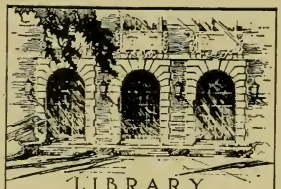

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MR. CHAINE'S SONS

MR. CHAINE'S SONS

A Novel

BY

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AUTHOR OF 'THIRLBY HALL,' 'A BACHELOR'S BLUNDER,'
'THE ROGUE,' ETC.

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MR. CHAINE'S SONS

CHAPTER I

AN ECCLESIASTICAL GARDEN-PARTY

THERE is a certain ideal sense of the fitness of things, common to all educated—possibly also to uneducated—persons, from which the mind can never wholly divest itself, and which maintains its sway, notwithstanding the exhaustive knowledge of human nature and this evil world which most of us are tolerably confident that we possess. Experience, to be sure, has taught us that the standard of morality is no higher amongst rustics than amongst citizens, that the clergy are by no means exempt from the petty failings which mar the characters of laymen, that lawyers are not necessarily

rogues, nor sisters of charity and Sunday School teachers necessarily saints—in short, that humanity is pretty much the same all the world over, and that we shall not go very far wrong if we meekly murmur the responses in the Litany on behalf of our neighbours as well as of ourselves. Nevertheless, we are apt to be shocked when we come across what we imagine to be exceptions to our imaginary rules; we cling to the notion that sundry localities have sundry characteristics belonging to them as of right, and a cathedral close will, no doubt, continue to be generally regarded as the abode of dignified leisure, scholarship, and piety, until such time as the Radical reformers get their will, and deans and canons are swept away, together with other survivals of a less utilitarian age.

There exists, of course, a small minority of persons who have no illusions left upon the subjects of deans and canons; and these, it is scarcely necessary to add, are the deans and canons themselves, with their respective wives and families. They know, if nobody else does,

that under the shadow of those time-worn Norman and Gothic edifices which testify to the faith of our ancestors, generation after generation of gossips and scandal-mongers have lived and died; they know very well what dignified leisure means, and have the best of all reasons for being aware that ecclesiastical magnates are but mortal. And to no one could the latter unquestionable fact have been brought home more painfully than it had been to Mrs. Stanton, the widow of a late canon of St. Albyn's, who had lost a thousand a year by her husband's lamented demise. After that deplorable event Mrs. Stanton continued to reside at St. Albyn's. She had become accustomed to the place; she doubted whether any change of quarters would prove a change for the better, and, as she had an only daughter, whose interests it would be necessary to take into consideration in due season, she thought that, upon the whole, her wisest course would be to remain amongst the friends whom she had made. These friends, it is true, showed themselves extremely amiable;

still there was a tinge of patronage about their amiability which constantly reminded her of her reduced circumstances, and perhaps that was why she entertained no very exalted opinion of them as a class.

One spring afternoon she was walking with her daughter from the suburban villa in which they now dwelt towards the Precincts, where Canon and Mrs. Pickersgill were giving a garden-party, and it was little that she had to say in favour of garden-parties or of Canon and Mrs. Pickersgill.

'It isn't so much the dulness of these entertainments that I object to,' she remarked; 'one knows they are bound to be dull, and the Pickersgills, I suppose, couldn't be anything else if they tried: what I do so hate is the ill-natured talk that always goes on at them. Well, one comfort is that Mrs. Pickersgill and everybody else will be so full of Ida Pemberton's wedding this afternoon that they probably won't have time to say anything particularly ill-natured about us.'

'I don't think they often say ill-natured

things about us, mamma,' the younger lady returned, 'and I don't see why we should care a pin if they did.'

'That is just it, my dear Violet,' sighed Mrs. Stanton; 'you don't see a great many things which it would be better for you to see, and you won't be guided by those who are older and perhaps a little wiser than yourself. No girl can afford to be talked about—certainly no girl in your position can—and you do make yourself talked about by galloping across country without a groom. It is not the thing, and I have no answer for Mrs. Pickersgill and the rest of them when they tell me that it is not the thing.'

'The next time that they tell you so, mamma, you can answer that they have been misinformed, and that it isn't usual to gallop across country after the hunting has come to an end,' observed the girl composedly. 'Bob must have exercise, you know. I would cheerfully allow a groom to ride behind me if I had a groom or a second horse to mount him on; but as I have neither, I can't help riding alone.'

'You could help it if you chose to give up riding,' returned Mrs. Stanton; but she spoke in faint-hearted accents, not as one possessed of authority.

In truth she had long since abandoned all serious efforts to exercise control over her daughter, whose will was a strong one, whereas her own was weak. The least skilled of physiognomists might have seen at a glance which of these two ladies was born to command and which to obey. Mrs. Stanton, small, thin and middle-aged, conveyed the impression of looking older than she actually was. She walked with a somewhat shuffling gait; her features showed some signs of bygone prettiness, but the prettiness was altogether bygone; her blue eyes were faded and sunken; her hair, of a dull brown hue, was plentifully besprinkled with gray; she was evidently one of those women who, for all practical purposes, die with their youth. Her daughter resembled her only in respect of diminutive stature. Miss Violet Stanton's manner of carrying herself indicated excellent

health and considerable decision of character. She held her little head high, as though conscious that it was entitled to the respectful admiration of all beholders—which indeed it was. Her eyes were of no indeterminate colour, but of that clear, dark gray which, by a happy provision of Nature, is almost always softened by long, curved eyelashes; she had a pale, creamy complexion; her nose and chin were perfectly formed, and if the latter was a trifle too prominent, the general effect of her face was redeemed from hardness by the exquisite contour of her full lips. When it is added that, besides the above advantages, she possessed a remarkably neat figure, everybody will understand how reasonable it was of Mrs. Stanton to expect that her daughter would some day make a great match.

The expectation was reasonable in itself, and would doubtless have been fulfilled, had Miss Stanton been in the way of meeting with wealthy young noblemen; but unfortunately neither wealth nor nobility were very common in the neighbourhood of St. Albyn's, and there

was no ground for hope that Miss Stanton would ever be able to exhibit her charms in any other neighbourhood. As Mrs. Stanton often said to herself sorrowfully, there was really nobody except the Chaines, who, after all, were only tolerably well-to-do country gentlemen; and now John Chaine was going to marry Ida Pemberton, so there was an end of him, such as he was.

'It is a curious sort of marriage,' she remarked meditatively, after remaining silent for some minutes. 'I'm sure I don't know how it will turn out.'

'As well as most marriages, I suppose,' said Violet. 'Why shouldn't it?'

Mrs. Stanton shook her head.

'I sincerely hope that it may,' she declared; 'still, there are circumstances which make one feel a little doubtful about it.'

'Oh, you mean that affair with young Mayne. Yes; I dare say Ida has consecrated a few tears to his memory; but people can't marry upon nothing a year, and I doubt whether she is the kind of girl to break her

heart over a sentimental disappointment. Mr. John Chaine, who is good-natured and stupid, and ridiculously in love, will answer her purpose very well. What more can any woman ask for in a husband than that he should be well off and willing to let her have her own way and make her a handsome allowance?'

Mrs. Stanton could not altogether approve of such sentiments, although, as a matter of fact, she wished her daughter to act in accordance with them. Like the generality of British matrons, she objected to crude avowals and would fain have seen others as capable as she herself was of reconciling expediency with the loftiest theories of conduct. So she said:

'My dear, you should not talk like that; it sounds so dreadfully heartless and worldly. And we have no right to assume that Ida Pemberton is not honestly attached to her future husband. Indeed we ought to take it for granted that she is.'

'Only we don't,' remarked Violet. 'Well, I trust that she will be happy, and I quite think that she will; and so do you, mamma.

Anyhow, I am sure that if she had been your daughter, you wouldn't have allowed her to marry Mr. Mayne.'

'One *could* not allow it,' sighed Mrs. Stanton, 'and I don't in the least blame the Dean for having forbidden it, if he did forbid it. At the same time, it does give one rather a shock to hear him preaching as he does, and to know, as one cannot help knowing, that he has strained every nerve to bring about this match. It gives one a disagreeable feeling of doubt about the sincerity of his professions. But I never could like the man, and I must say that I never understood why he was made Dean. Your father always considered it a most extraordinary appointment.'

The late Canon Stanton would not have considered it at all extraordinary if the appointment in question had been conferred upon himself, and his widow was decidedly of opinion that it ought to have been so conferred. The grudge which she cherished against Dean Pemberton (who was a dean like another) was a very old story, and Violet was

a little tired of the subject. No further discussion of it was inflicted upon her now; for by this time she and her mother had reached the Precincts, and as they stepped through an arched doorway into one of those charming sheltered gardens, of which cathedrals and colleges possess a monopoly, Mrs. Stanton dismissed all painful memories from her mind, in order that her company smile might not have the appearance of being forced.

Canon Pickersgill, a little roundabout, rosy-faced man, trotted across the lawn to welcome them, followed at a more leisurely pace by his hook-nosed, bettle-browed wife. He shook his forefinger playfully at the two ladies and said:

'What fashionable people you are! Everybody else has been here for the last hour.'

Mrs. Pickersgill only said, 'How do you do?' and did not say that with any great cordiality. In cathedral cities the wife of a canon is a personage, whereas the widow of a dead one is, of course, nobody, and it is very necessary that those who occupy high official

positions should display a certain stateliness and reserve. Otherwise their inferiors might be tempted to take liberties with them. Indeed, it was doubtful whether Mrs. Stanton had not taken rather a liberty by arriving so late.

However, the redoubtable Mrs. Pickersgill was fain to unbend when she and the newcomers had joined a little band of ladies who had drawn their wicker-chairs together upon the lawn and were discussing what was at that time a topic of absorbing interest in St. Albyn's; for Mrs. Pickersgill loved gossip, and a combination of gossip with dignity is a difficult thing to achieve. Her tastes were fully shared by Mrs. Stanton, for whom a chair was found, and who at once began to take part in the conversation which her advent only interrupted for a moment. Violet, standing behind her mother, overheard, without paying much heed to, what the old ladies were saying.

'The whole business has been hurried through in a way that one would have thought

rather uncalled for. Considering that the engagement was only announced six weeks ago, it does seem quick work that the wedding should take place to-morrow.' 'Oh, well, one can understand the Dean's anxiety to get it safely over and done with. Ida is just one of those girls who are capable of doing an idiotic thing at any moment, and she doesn't even pretend to care for the man.' 'She has sense enough to know how to feather her nest, it seems; she is not likely to do anything idiotic either before or after her marriage—at least, we must hope that she isn't. I suspect that the Dean was not so much afraid of that as of some difficulty being raised by the Chaines. I hear that neither old Mr. Chaine nor Lady Elizabeth are best pleased with the match, and indeed I don't wonder. It can't be called a brilliant one.'

These and other comments of an equally amiable description had already been made some scores of times; but apparently they had not yet palled upon the ladies who interchanged them. Upon the present occasion

they had to be uttered in a discreet undertone, because the Dean, with his hands behind his back and his gaitered legs wide apart, was standing hard by, benevolently looking on at a game of croquet—probably St. Albyn's is the only place in England where croquet has been played every summer without a break since the date of its invention — and Miss Pemberton herself was not very far off.

Violet Stanton looked curiously at the Dean's daughter, who was a few years older than herself, and with whom she had never been upon terms of intimacy. What she saw was a very tall, very handsome and very weary-looking young woman, whose large brown eyes were more than half-veiled by her drooped eyelids. She was sitting on a chair at some little distance from the various groups which had congregated here and there upon the lawn, and appeared to be satisfied with the seclusion which she had evidently chosen for herself. Miss Pemberton dressed well, passed for being accomplished and was generally considered to give herself airs, inasmuch as she was not in

the habit of taking trouble to make conversation for the benefit of those who failed to interest her. St. Albyn's knew very little more than this about the girl, except that there had been a somewhat pronounced flirtation between her and Arthur Mayne, a son of one of the canons, which had been put a stop to for the best of reasons. Arthur Mayne was a young barrister, without a penny in the world beyond the modest allowance which his father could afford to give him, and it was not to be expected of the Dean that he should undertake to support an impecunious son-in-law. So much the old ladies were willing to concede; but they felt bound to withhold their approval from the match which had been so hastily arranged between Ida and the most eligible bachelor of the vicinity. Some of them had daughters of their own who might possibly have consented to make that eligible bachelor happy; others doubted whether poor John Chaine, who seldom showed himself in St. Albyn's, knew everything that he ought to have known; all were agreed that the girl had

displayed a lack of proper and natural feeling which augured ill for her future husband's peace of mind. But Miss Pemberton, who could hardly have been ignorant of what was being said about her, was obviously and unaffectedly indifferent; and this was what roused Violet Stanton's curiosity.

Violet had her own clear and decided ideas upon the subject of matrimony; but it is one thing to have ideas and quite another to put them into practice. She knew very well, for instance, that she could not, if it had come to the push, have brought herself to marry that heavy, plain-featured, bucolic personage, John Chaine; assuredly she could not have done so if she had previously committed the folly of falling in love with somebody else, and she wondered how Ida Pemberton had contrived to achieve that victory over the weakness of mortal nature.

Well, there was little probability of her obtaining any answer by scrutinising the impassive countenance of the bride-elect; and presently her attention was diverted from that

study by Canon Pickersgill, who touched her on the elbow, saying:

'Miss Stanton, I want to introduce Mr. Hubert Chaine to you. I am surprised to hear from him that he hasn't had that honour before; but, to be sure, he has seldom been at home since he joined his regiment.'

Violet turned round and bowed to a smartly dressed young man, with a flower in his button-hole, who was taking off his hat to her. At the first moment she noticed nothing more than the button-hole and the cut of his clothes —St. Albyn's being a cavalry station, she had met with a good many young men of his pattern, which had consequently ceased to interest her—but when he began to speak, she was attracted by the singularly pleasant pitch and modulation of his voice; so that she took another glance at him, and thus became aware that he was extremely good-looking. He had a fresh complexion, blue-eyes, hair which was almost golden and a moustache which was quite so; and, if Violet had only known it, it was a curious freak on the part of Nature to

have sent him into the world with that kind of colouring, because the Chaines from time immemorial have been either red-headed or as dark as Spaniards.

'I've often heard about you, Miss Stanton,' he was saying; 'my brother John says you go straighter than any man in the hunt. I haven't had a day with these hounds since I was a small boy on a small pony; but I know it is a stiffish country in some parts. Too stiff for poor old John, who swears he has lost his nerve. I dare say you know more about that than I do; though I can't imagine old John shirking his fences.'

'Oh, I shouldn't say that he shirked,' answered Violet — for indeed she would not have brought so serious an accusation as that against any fellow-creature without good and sufficient reason—'he isn't exactly what you could call a hard rider, of course.'

'Why of course?' asked the young man, laughing. 'John isn't quite as old as he looks, you know. Ah, well, I suppose the day is bound to come when we shall none of us be

hard riders any more. As for John, he will soon be a married man, and married men have no business to risk their necks.'

'Have you come down for the wedding?' Violet inquired.

Hubert Chaine nodded.

'The family will be well represented in the cathedral to-morrow,' he answered; 'we always muster in full strength at weddings and funerals. My father says these events ought to draw us together and give us grave thoughts about the duties and responsibilities of life. I'm sure he looks as if his thoughts were grave enough for anything; and so does John. Poor old John! How he will hate all the fuss and ceremony of the thing!'

'Well, he has brought it upon himself, hasn't he?' said Violet. 'Why is he not here this afternoon?'

'For the same reason that he wouldn't be in the cathedral to-morrow if he could help it; he would have liked to be married in the parish church at some unearthly hour of the morning, so as to choke off spectators. If

you know John, you must know that he can't stand being stared at. He has taken an idea into his stupid old head that he is about the ugliest man in England and that when people look in his direction they are either shuddering or laughing at him. How in the world he ever summoned up courage to propose to that formidable-looking girl I can't conceive.'

'Do you consider her formidable-looking?' Violet inquired; for it was not easy to dispute the fact of John Chaine's ugliness.

'I do indeed; and it isn't only her looks that are formidable. She has a calm way of remaining silent when you speak to her which is too much for me, though I don't think I am constitutionally timid. Between you and me, I am even more astonished at her for having accepted John than I am at John for having proposed to her.'

There was a frankness about this young man's utterances which may have been in some degree infectious.

'I don't see anything so very astonishing

in that,' Violet declared; 'marriage isn't always an affair of sentiment. Of course it isn't very pretty behaviour in a man to marry for money, though plenty of them do it; but women, it seems to me, can hardly help themselves. They can't earn their own living, and they can't marry paupers; so that they have to think twice or three times before they refuse an offer from somebody who has good means and better prospects.'

'They can remain unmarried, though,' observed Hubert, who seemed to be slightly shocked by this avowal of worldly-mindedness on the part of one so young.

'Yes, they have that privilege; only things are sometimes made rather unpleasant for them at home if they avail themselves of it. Personally, I have quite determined to take the first rich man who may turn up; and if he has gray hair, or no hair at all, I shall endeavour to be resigned. One can't have everything.'

Her interlocutor gazed at her for a moment with a puzzled expression, and then remarked,

in the relieved tone of one who has hit upon the solution of an enigma—

'Ah, you don't really mean that!'

'I do mean it, I assure you; and, what is more, I believe that ninety-nine women out of a hundred feel just as I do, though they may not care to admit as much.'

'Then,' declared Mr. Hubert Chaine emphatically, 'all I can say is, I sincerely hope, for poor old John's sake, that Miss Pemberton is not one of the ninety-and-nine.'

'She looks so like the hundredth, doesn't she?' returned Violet, with a scornful curl of her lip, for she was not accustomed to being rebuked in that way by young men.

However, this young man was not an easy person to quarrel with. He had taken a fancy to Miss Stanton, and, since he was not thinking of asking her to marry him, it was, after all, no business of his what her opinions might be upon the married state. He changed the subject to one upon which she was always ready to enlarge, and very soon he had heard a graphic description of the best runs that had

taken place in Southshire during the previous hunting season. In return, he told her all about the sport obtainable in the neighbourhood of York, where his regiment was quartered; so that they became excellent friends before they parted.

'I must be off,' the young man said at length, glancing at his watch; 'my father insists upon dining at the unrighteous hour of half-past seven, and if we aren't all on the spot when the bell rings, we catch it. I shall see you at the Deanery to-morrow, I dare say.'

'I dare say you will, if you search diligently,' Violet replied; 'but it isn't an absolute certainty. Everybody in the place will be there, and I am too short to be conspicuous in a crowd.'

'Oh, I'll search,' he returned, laughing, 'and I shan't give up until I find either.'

With that he took his departure, having produced a decidedly favourable impression upon a young lady who had the name of being fastidious.

CHAPTER II

OFF WITH THE OLD LOVE

When Mrs. and Miss Stanton went away, Ida Pemberton was still sitting in the same spot where she had been the whole afternoon, and was still gazing at nothing. From time to time she had been approached by one or other of her fellow-guests; but her conversation with them had been but brief and had ended in each case by the discomfiture of her interlocutor. Not that she had been rude to them, for it was not her custom to be rude to anybody; only she had shown them in the plainest possible manner that she neither wished to talk to them nor to hear them talk, and that is an intimation which is apt to damp even the most genial of would-be friends. She might have made friends in St. Albyn's, had she cared to do so, because

the Dean's daughter is, after all, the daughter of the Dean; but she had not cared to do so, and if she had avoided making open enemies, the credit of that was probably due to her actual and prospective position, rather than to herself. It was, in truth, a matter of absolute indifference to her whether she was loved or hated in St. Albyn's and its neighbourhood. Everything was a matter of indifference to her, including the circumstance that she was to be married on the morrow to the most eligible personage in the county. She knew very well what was in store for her. She was to spend the honeymoon abroad, after which she would take up her residence at the White House, and look after the servants, and order the dinner, and return visits, and possibly rear a young family, until such time as old Mr. Chaine should be gathered to his fathers, when the same programme would be carried out upon a somewhat more extensive scale at Chaine Court. Her future was as plainly mapped out as that of any woman could be, and she had no particular quarrel

with it. When one cannot have what one's whole heart is set upon, it matters little enough whether one's duties and relaxations are to be of this kind or of that.

So there she sat alone, taking no heed either of the passage of time or of the inquisitive glances which were constantly being directed at her tall, commanding figure, her slightly aquiline nose, her half-closed eyes and her pale cheeks. She was aware that people were in all probability looking at her; but she did not mind—they were welcome to gaze their fill. She had been told that it was her duty to be present at this garden-party, and she was doing her duty; when the time should come for her to be released, she would presumably receive a hint to that effect from her father.

But in this reasonable expectation she was disappointed; for the Dean hastily and surreptitiously withdrew as soon as he saw that a game of croquet had been arranged between four grave and reverend canons. The Dean of St. Albyn's, who had not long held his pre-

sent appointment, and who was in some respects a wise man, was anxious to keep upon good terms with the Chapter, and he had discovered betimes that this could not be done by any onlooker who was liable to be appealed to in the case of a disputed point at croquet. As far as questions of ritual, discipline and ecclesiastical business went, the canons were an amenable set of men; but the moment that they took up their croquet-mallets, they became infinitely more fractious, unfair and quarrelsome than any little schoolboys would have been; and, unfortunately, they could not meet without challenging one another to a game. It was their habit to attend the numerous garden-parties held in the Precincts, to fidget about uneasily in the background until the ladies had begun to depart, and then to engage in frays which not only roused the worst passions of their natures, but too often led them into making accusations which no man who respected himself could overlook. Thus Canon Tyler had more than once been charged in so many words with

cheating, and thus the intervention of the Dean had been invoked after a fashion which that dignitary had resolved must not occur again.

If Ida Pemberton had been in a state of mind to amuse herself by watching the little foibles of poor humanity, she might have obtained some innocent diversion now; for Canon Tyler, a solemn, lanky Oxford professor, had taken the war-path, with Canon Pickersgill for his partner, and against this pair were pitted a couple of silver-haired, benevolent-looking clerics who were thoroughly bent upon defeating their antagonists. Nor was it long before the results of this determination—in itself quite a laudable one—became perceptible.

'Oh, of course you can do it if you like,' Canon Tyler called out in a loud, harsh voice; 'I do not say that it is against the rules, and I am surprised that words which I never used should have been put into my mouth; but I do say that it is not the game.'

Thereupon the two silver-haired ones

tittered in a provoking manner; but the contest proceeded without further interruption for a few more minutes, when Canon Tyler suddenly flung down his mallet and stuffed his hands into his pockets.

'This is ridiculous!' he exclaimed. 'It is more than ridiculous, it is childish! A game is a game, and unless it is to be played in the proper way, I prefer not to play it at all.'

He waited for no reply, but stumped off angrily, with his head bent forward and his shoulders very high, while one of his late opponents ejaculated mildly—

'Dear me!'

'It is a great pity,' observed good-natured little Canon Pickersgill, trotting up to Ida's chair, 'that Tyler is so short in the temper. I have known Tyler for many years, and I have the highest possible esteem for him; but I must say that he is exceedingly ill-mannered at times.'

'Is he?' said Ida, rousing herself from her abstraction and getting up. 'Well, I suppose we are all ill-mannered at times, and it cer-

tainly can't be good manners to stay on at a garden-party after everybody else has gone away. Do you happen to know what has become of my father?'

Canon Pickersgill did not know—nor did his wife, to whom application was made—but it was evident that the Dean was no longer upon the premises; so Ida took her leave, and strolled slowly homewards through the quiet, deserted cloisters. She did not hurry herself, there being no need for hurry and the evening being so warm and summer-like. The smooth sward of the close was flooded with sunshine from the west and barred by the black shadows of the old elms; the rooks were coming home with loud cawings, the jackdaws were circling round the cathedral towers, and from the town outside arose that ceaseless, inarticulate hum of human life which is pleasant to some ears and irritating to others. Ida seated herself upon the stone parapet beneath one of the arches, to see and hear the last of these familiar sights and sounds—possibly also to dwell for the last

time upon certain memories with which the scene was associated in her mind.

Presently she heard the echo of an approaching footfall upon the flagstones, but she did not trouble herself to turn her head as it drew nearer, nor would she have done so even when it paused close behind her, had not the intruder upon her solitude accosted her by name. Then she started violently and became a shade paler, for the voice was one which she had good reason to recognise. However, she recovered her self-possession immediately, and, getting up, said in very cold and distant accents—

'How do you do, Mr. Mayne? I did not know that you had returned.'

She made as though she would have passed on, but this broad-shouldered young fellow placed himself full in her path, so that she was fain to halt and confront him with an air of displeased interrogation. He was a well-knit, vigorous young Englishman of the type which our public schools and universities turn out every year by the hundred, and he would

doubtless have passed unnoticed in a crowd of his contemporaries ; yet any one who had taken the trouble to scrutinise his face would probably have divined that he possessed abilities somewhat above the average, for he had a broad forehead, his hazel eyes were bright and well-opened and there was an appearance of decision about his mouth and chin; so that he might fairly hope to make his living eventually as a barrister. At present, however, he had not yet earned a sixpence; and that was why he was now standing in the cloisters at St. Albyn's, with a look of pain and despair upon his honest countenance.

'I only came home last night,' he said; 'I have been abroad, as perhaps you know, and —and I have heard nothing of what has been going on during my absence. Is it possible that what my father tells me can be true— that you are to be married to-morrow to that oaf, John Chaine?'

'It is so possible and so true,' replied Miss Pemberton tranquilly, 'that I think you would have shown rather better taste if you had

allowed me to answer you before calling Mr. Chaine an oaf. Especially as you must have known perfectly well that it was true.'

'There are things which one can't believe without proof positive,' he returned. 'Of course I have no right to complain——'

'Complain!' broke in Ida, her composure abruptly giving way to indignation. 'To complain of what? I really don't understand you, Mr. Mayne.'

But Mr. Mayne did not seem to be at all abashed by this rebuke. 'You can't help understanding me,' he said sadly; 'if I never told you in so many words that I loved you, that was not because either you or I were ignorant of it. I could not ask you to be my wife for the simple reason that I haven't money enough yet to support a wife, and I suppose you were aware of that. Well, as I said before, I have no right to complain, and if you had met with another man whom you could care for I should have held my tongue. But to sell yourself to that red-headed lout John Chaine, whom I have heard you speak of with con-

tempt a dozen times—no; I could not have believed that you would do such a thing as that!'

'You are very insolent and very unjust,' Ida began, but an obstruction in her throat prevented her from finishing her sentence, and she pressed her fingers tightly to her lips for a moment. Then, regaining her self-control, she resumed: 'I am sorry that you consider yourself ill-used, though I certainly cannot accuse myself of having used you ill. Perhaps you hardly realise the meaning of what you have been saying. You speak as though you were under the impression that I should have accepted you if you had proposed to me.'

'I am under that impression,' replied Mr. Mayne unhesitatingly. 'What use is there in making believe, since we two are alone and nobody can hear us? You may have changed; but you cannot have forgotten so soon. Must I remind you of that evening last winter when I met you close to this very spot, and when I think we understood one another as plainly as it was possible for us to do without an actual exchange of promises?'

'It is generous of you to remind me of that!' exclaimed Ida, her anger once more getting the better of her—and, indeed, throughout this interview it would have been curious to a disinterested observer to notice how a naturally passionate temperament kept asserting itself, in spite of the curb of a powerful will—'it is generous of you to remind me that upon one occasion I was led by you into saying more than I ought to have said! At all events, I was not long in repenting of my folly. Whatever I may have thought of you at the time, I found out what you really were when you left the place the next day. And then you talk of complaining! It seems to me that if one of us has a right to complain, it is not you; but pray make your mind quite easy. I have no complaint to make; I am only too thankful that my eyes were opened in time.'

'Good God, Ida,' exclaimed Arthur Mayne hotly, 'you surely don't imagine that I meant to desert you! What was I to do when your father sent for me and pointed out that I was compromising you? He said that, as I was

not in a position to marry, the only honourable course open to me was to go away, and I couldn't contradict him. He promised to speak to you upon the subject, and when I spoke of writing to you, he begged me, as a personal favour, not to do that. I understood from him that he would give you every explanation that I could have given.'

'He never told me a word about it,' said Ida faintly.

The young man groaned. 'Then,' said he, 'I think the Dean has acted very unfairly by me. He was entitled to forbid our engagement, but he made no objection to me individually; and I hoped that you would be willing to wait a few years. We have both been deceived, it seems; but happily we both know the truth now. Ida, will you wait for me?'

She broke out into a hysterical laugh. 'What are you talking about?' she asked. 'Have you forgotten that to-morrow is my wedding-day?'

'It is for you to say whether to-morrow

shall be your wedding-day or not. You will have to face a good deal of discomfort and annoyance, no doubt; but the question is whether that is not a small price to pay for your liberty. It is unpleasant to be the subject of a nine days' wonder; but surely it is a thousand times worse to be bound for life to a man whom you despise.'

'I don't despise John Chaine,' she returned feebly. 'He isn't clever like you; but he is good and honest, and he has been very kind to me.'

'That may be; but you do not love him, and therefore you would be miserable with him. Tell me truly, Ida—have you ceased to care for me? Because I know you did care for me once.'

She raised her eyes to his, and, reading her answer there, he impulsively moved a step nearer to her. But she drew back at once.

'No,' she said in a firmer voice, 'it is too late now. I have made my choice and I must abide by it. If I had known before—if my

father had spoken to me—it might have been different; but I cannot draw back at the eleventh hour.'

'You are afraid?'

'If you like to say so. At any rate, I have made up my mind. And now, Mr. Mayne, I must say good-bye. I am sure you will understand that we had better not meet again for a long time to come.'

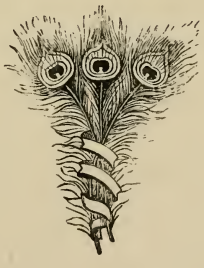
Arthur Mayne was a resolute man, and he was not going to acknowledge himself defeated so easily as that. Yet he was defeated in the end. Ida listened impassively to his arguments and entreaties, and although once or twice she appeared to be moved, it was only for a moment.

'All this is mere waste of words,' she said at length; 'you only go on repeating the same thing, and I have only the same reply to make. What you ask for is impossible.'

'Good-bye, then,' he returned almost roughly. 'I can't tell whether you love me or not; but it is evident that, if you do, you love yourself a good deal more. Perhaps, after

all, you may contrive to be happy with the man whom you have chosen.'

Her eyes filled with tears; but she turned away without answering, and he made no further effort to detain her. He watched her tall figure as it passed slowly along the cloisters out of sight; then he strode away in the opposite direction, cursing the whole fickle race of womankind, as many another man has done before him, some with more and some with less of justice.



CHAPTER III

THE CHAINE FAMILY

In the England of the nineteenth century fanaticism is necessarily a little ridiculous, since it is deprived of the power of making itself terrible. Nevertheless, as fanatics would not be fanatics unless they were conscientious and strong of will, they frequently end by acquiring the esteem, sometimes even the affection, of their fellow-men. No better example of this kind of success could have been found than in the person of Mr. Chaine of Chaine Court, sometime Member for Southshire and still, notwithstanding his failing health, an active member of numerous benevolent associations. When Mr. Chaine first entered Parliament he was laughed at, although he was always a forcible and impressive speaker; but as years went on, the House grew ac-

customed to him and pardoned his truculent Protestantism in consideration of his upright character and the many services that he had rendered to the community. It is, no doubt, silly and out of date to regard the Pope as Antichrist and all High Churchmen as Jesuits in disguise; but this tall, gaunt, handsome personage, with his piercing black eyes, his bushy eyebrows and his aquiline nose, was in a measure above ridicule. The ordinary M.P. might poke fun at him behind his back, but was uneasily conscious of a certain inferiority in his presence. Besides, he had introduced or had been instrumental in passing Acts for the relief of miners, factory hands and other formerly neglected human beings, which were now acknowledged to be just and beneficent. The ordinary M.P. was not sorry to have that excuse for applauding him, because the ordinary M.P., like all other ordinary individuals, was mortally afraid of him.

In private, as in public life, Mr. Chaine had the faculty of inspiring awe and obedience. His wife, Lady Elizabeth, a good-natured,

easy-going woman, had acknowledged his supremacy from the first, and perhaps that is why she had more influence over him than anybody else. At all events, she knew the length of her tether and never attempted to divert him from his purposes, save within well-defined limits. In former times Mr. Chaine would have been a Torquemada or a Calvin, as circumstances might have decreed; having been born in our day, he was merely a benevolent sort of anachronism and a most disagreeable person to live in the house with. He had his own ideas of duty, which were correct enough in the main; but he was unable to admit that any man or woman could honestly hold other views, and this made things very uncomfortable for those who were dependent upon him and who happened to hold other views. Neither his wife nor his sons ever argued with him: in the first place, it would have been useless, and in the second place, he would assuredly have punished them for their contumacy. The natural consequence was that they

systematically deceived him; for neither the average young man nor the average elderly woman can contrive to walk through life along that extremely narrow way which, according to Mr. Chaine, alone led to salvation. They took their several ways—Lady Elizabeth and John and Wilfrid and Hubert —and it was only every now and then that he found them out and (as he thought) whipped them back on to the scent.

'It is a matter of sheer necessity,' Lady Elizabeth would often say to her second son, who was also her favourite son, 'that we should keep your dear father in the dark. It would break his heart if he suspected that we were miserable sinners, like the rest of the world, and we should never be able to persuade him that we are in the habit of repenting of our sins regularly every evening, just as he himself does.'

Wilfrid Chaine, who was very far indeed from having formed any such habit as his mother referred to, fully concurred in her sentiments. He had concealed his sins as

effectually from her as he had from his father, and he had every intention of maintaining a discreet reserve upon that delicate subject. Mr. Chaine, who prided himself upon meting out equal and impartial justice to all, and who was by nature incapacitated from comprehending even so much as the principles of human justice (which is but a sorry makeshift at best), would have died rather than confess that he preferred or favoured one of his sons above the others. As a matter of fact, he loved Wilfrid, who was handsome, clever and silver-tongued; he just tolerated Hubert, whom he regarded as an empty-headed, unconverted, yet not evilly-disposed boy; and John, his first-born, he hated. It is needless to add that the above statement would have appeared to him to be the grossest and most unwarrantable of calumnies; but, since he is now dead and buried, the narrator of this history may as well tell the truth about him.

The truth is that he might have been a moderately good judge of character, instead of a singularly bad one, and yet have preferred

Wilfrid to John. Wilfrid, like the majority of the Chaines, was handsome, dark-complexioned and undeniably clever, whereas John, like a few of them, was red-haired, stupid and sulky. Such, at all events, would have been their father's verdict, had he spoken quite candidly, and it not unnaturally vexed him to think that the clever representative of the rising generation should have made his appearance in the world five years later than the dull one. John, moreover, had in years gone by been guilty of certain youthful peccadilloes which Mr. Chaine chose to remember after everybody else had forgotten them, while Wilfrid had either kept clear of scrapes or had seemed to do so. Wilfrid, it was true, had not as yet achieved distinction; but he was quite sure to distinguish himself eventually, because the Chaines always did. They had been secretaries of State, lord chancellors, bishops, admirals and generals from time immemorial. Now, it was as clear as the sun at noonday that John Chaine would never be anything but a country gentleman, with

I see no reason to doubt that Miss Pemberton's affection for John is as sincere as his for her. I have decided to assign the White House to them as their residence, and I shall make suitable provision for them during my lifetime.'

The old autocrat would no more have suffered any criticism of his decrees than he would have dreamt of questioning their wisdom; nor had Lady Elizabeth ever ventured to express her secret hope that he might see his way to doing John full justice while abstaining from making an elder son of him. For Lady Elizabeth, too, adored Wilfrid and had little in common with the unpopular heir-apparent.

On the eve of John's marriage, quite a large party assembled round the dinner-table at Chaine Court, where visitors had been rare since Mr. Chaine's illness. Wilfrid had arrived from London in order to be present at the forthcoming ceremony; Hubert had come down from York; and, besides these principal personages, there was a goodly array of uncles,

aunts, and cousins, Mr. Chaine being a great stickler for the recognition of all family events by the family at large. They were all so much in awe of the grim old man who sat at the head of the table that they would have been a dismal enough assemblage, but for the exertions of Wilfrid, who possessed the enviable knack of knowing how to put everybody in good humour. It is difficult to explain the kind of fascination that belongs to such men as Wilfrid Chaine. Physical beauty may have something to say to it; a pleasant smile and the intuition of how to say the right thing to the right person probably have a good deal more; but over and above these gifts, which, after all, are not so very uncommon, Wilfrid had an undefinable attractiveness which even those who had substantial grounds for distrusting him could not resist.

Supposing that, amongst the guests collected there that evening, there had been one who not only distrusted but disliked him, that exceptionally clear-sighted person might have surmised that he was doing his best to exhibit

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his elder brother under an unamiable aspect; but, as it was, the guests only perceived that he was indulging in a little good-humoured chaff, such as is usual between young men, and that his senior was receiving it in a singularly churlish manner.

'Just look at John!' Wilfrid was saying, in an audible voice, to his neighbour. 'Wouldn't anybody imagine that, instead of being a happy bridegroom, he was nerving himself to have his leg cut off?' And then, speaking a little more loudly: 'Cheer up, John,' he called out; 'things aren't so desperate as you think. Many a man has married before now and survived it.'

The red-haired, beetle-browed giant on the other side of the table frowned and grunted, but made no articulate reply.

'And I can tell you,' continued his tormentor, smilingly, 'that many a man would give a good deal to be in your shoes. I won't be so indiscreet as to mention names; but we all know that you have had rivals and that you have triumphed over them. Try to look

triumphant; it would be ever so much more becoming.'

John's cheeks became almost as red as his hair, and his eyes, which were also of a reddish tinge, flashed ominously.

'One lady-killer is about enough in a family,' said he. 'I never set up to be anything of the sort, and if I have had rivals, I take it that that's rather more my affair than yours. You leave me alone and I'll promise to do as much by you.'

'Oh, no offence!' returned Wilfrid; but there was a shade of uneasiness in the mocking glance which he threw at his brother; for he had never before been accused of being a lady-killer in the home circle, and he was not quite so sure as he would have liked to be that this was merely a chance shot on the part of stupid old John.

Mr. Chaine's deep voice struck in:

'Insinuations must not be made here, John, if you please. At your age you ought to have learnt to control your temper better. Let the subject be dropped.'

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'He attacked me, sir,' answered John sullenly.

'I said that the subject was to be dropped,' repeated his father, with a frown.

There was an interval of silence, during which the majority of the guests looked down at their plates and inwardly thanked Heaven that they were going away on the morrow. Probably not one of them felt the smallest sympathy for the ill-conditioned fellow whose irascibility had brought about this disagreeable little scene. Yet John's insinuation had not been of a very heinous character, and surely a request to be left alone is not in itself so unreasonable.

Reasonable or unreasonable, it was not granted. Wilfrid took no further notice of him during dinner, and devoted himself to the entertainment of the company; but later in the evening he returned to the charge, and contrived without much difficulty to arouse his victim's ire once more. He wanted to know what Miss Pemberton's tastes were. Was she fond of farming? Would she be

satisfied with rearing young chickens and watching the progress of the seasons till the end of her days? He only asked because, from what little he had seen of the lady, he should not have imagined that rusticity was very much in her line.

'I suppose my wife will be contented to lead the sort of life that I lead,' returned John angrily. 'She knows what that is, and she knows just as well as you do that I couldn't afford to take a house in London for the season even if I wanted to go in for society—which I don't. You had bette. mind your own business and allow me to look after mine.'

Whether by accident or by design, this second passage of arms took place in the hearing of old Mr. Chaine, who, as before, ranged himself upon the side of the younger disputant.

'There is little profit to be gained from mixing in London society,' said he, 'and I should be sorry to see my daughter-in-law wasting her life as women of fashion are wont

to do. At the same time, I do not think it wholesome—certainly it does not seem to tend towards producing urbanity of manners—that young people should reside from year's end to year's end in the country; and I am bound to say, John, that you misrepresent matters when you speak as though you would be unable to afford an occasional outing. Such remarks are equivalent to a reflection upon me, and if you have any complaint to make, you would act more straightforwardly by addressing it to me personally, not to others.'

John replied curtly that he had no complaint to make, and stalked off to the other end of the long drawing-room, through the open door of which he presently effected his escape. As far as money went, he had no reason to complain of his father: in other respects he had a good deal to complain of; but a great many years had passed since he had last attempted, in his somewhat uncouth fashion, to ask for what he knew must necessarily be denied to him. He was Wilfrid's senior by a long way, being now nearly forty

years of age, and even in his childhood, when he had been the only son and likely to remain so, he had been painfully aware that he was not beloved by his parents. Fate, *ludum insolentem ludere pertinax*, had made this seemingly rough and thick-skinned fellow abnormally sensitive and had refused him the faculty of expressing what he felt; he often spoke sullenly; he was believed—indeed he believed himself—to be a dull dog; and not even Wilfrid, who understood him better than anybody else, guessed how he winced under a contemptuous word or look. There must have been something noble in his nature; for he had never shown the slightest jealousy of Wilfrid, whom he admired immensely and who did not always tease him. His opinion of his own merits was so humble that he would willingly have apologised for the fact of his existence; he was quite of one mind with his father and mother in deeming that Wilfrid ought to have been the eldest son: but until quite recently he would have said that matters, after all, would right themselves

in the long run, since he was a confirmed bachelor and the property must eventually go to Wilfrid or his heir. But then an unforeseen and altogether improbable event had occurred. Little as he was accustomed to frequent female society (for it was his firm conviction that his appearance and manners rendered him positively repulsive to women), he had chanced to meet Ida Pemberton, had fallen madly in love with her, and, quite as much to his own amazement as to that of other people, had found favour in her sight. It was true that she had not affected to return his sentiments of passionate devotion; but that had seemed to him to be a matter of course—how would it have been possible for her to do so? He could but thank her from the bottom of his heart for consenting to be his wife, and acknowledge that his father, by handing over the White House to him, had behaved not only with justice but with generosity; for there could be no doubt but that his tardy renunciation of celibacy must have upset Mr. Chaine's calculations and

been a source of disappointment to other members of the family.

Thinking over all this in the solitude of the smoking-room, whither he betook himself after having made good his retreat from a scene in which he was not well qualified to shine, John freely forgave his younger brother for having been a little aggravating. It was natural enough that Wilfrid should be conscious of having had his nose put out of joint: besides, he probably had not intended to give such dire offence. How was he to guess that his good-humoured, commonplace raillery had fallen like strokes from a cutting whip upon a sore place?

And so, when Wilfrid sauntered in by and by to make his peace, he found himself in the presence of an offended person who was quite ready to meet him half-way.

'Poor old John!' he began, in the patronising but not unkindly accents which the other never thought of resenting; 'I put your back up just now, didn't I? You shouldn't be such an old porcupine, you know. No

wonder people give you credit for having a devil of a temper! But I'm sorry I made you stick up your quills; it wasn't done of malice prepense.'

'That's all right, old chap,' answered John a little sadly; 'I *have* a devil of a temper, and it wasn't your fault that you happened to rouse it. You see the honest truth is that I don't much like thinking about the men whom you call my former rivals—and then I'm sometimes afraid that Ida won't be able to stand the monotony of life at the White House. There's no getting over the fact that I am almost double her age, besides being—what I am.'

Wilfrid, who had selected a cigar from the case which stood upon the mantelpiece and was standing with his back to the fire and his hands in his pockets, looked down in a half-compassionate, half-amused way at the speaker. Wilfrid possessed the Chaine features under their best and most refined aspect. His aquiline nose was small for a nose of that shape; his black eyebrows were delicately

pencilled; his chin, though somewhat sharp, was not too prominent; and, as he wore no moustache, the perfect formation of his mouth and his short upper lip were exposed for the admiration of all beholders.

'*Aussi que diable allez-vous faire dans cette galère?*' he asked. 'The quotation is stale, I admit; but it is touchingly appropriate. If you had done me the honour to consult me before committing yourself to this rash enterprise, my poor, dear John, I should have endeavoured to dissuade you from it.'

'You wouldn't have succeeded.'

'I'm not so sure of that. However, the deed is done, or as good as done, now; so we won't cry over spilt milk. By the way, what made you describe me as a lady-killer in the presence of our august father? He doesn't appreciate that kind of joke, you know.'

'I wasn't joking,' answered John simply; "there's nothing to be ashamed of in being such a good-looking and agreeable fellow as you are, and it would be strange if women didn't fall in love with you.'

A scarcely perceptible expression of relief passed over the younger man's face. He did not mind such accusations, if couched in general terms, but he had feared that John might be alluding to a particular instance.

'You mean, I suppose,' he remarked, 'that I mix a good deal in the society of ladies; but if you were to ask them, they would tell you that what distinguishes me from other male creatures is my remarkable insensibility to their charms. You see, Johnny, my son, I am pretty well acquainted with their little ways. You aren't as yet, though you probably will be before you are much older. "When a man's married his trouble begins."'

'Not always, Wilfrid—not always,' returned John anxiously. 'The other day, while I was waiting for the train, I saw a little pamphlet on the bookstall, called *How to be Happy, though Married,* and I thought——'

But John's thoughts upon this difficult subject, as well as his brother's irrepressible

outburst of laughter, were interrupted here by the entrance of half a dozen of Lady Elizabeth's visitors, whose advent had the effect of speedily driving the expectant bridegroom out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

MR. AND MRS. JOHN

When Ida Pemberton reached home, after taking leave of Mr. Mayne in the manner described, she knocked at the door of her father's study, which his sonorous voice at once gave her permission to enter.

'Well, my dear,' said he, somewhat hastily pushing the book that he had been reading beneath the papers which lay upon his writing-table, 'so you have got away from your garden-party? I would have waited for you, but as soon as I saw Tyler with a croquet-mallet in his hand, I thought I had better withdraw. Occupying the position that I do, it is necessary for me to be very circumspect, and I do not care to be involved in controversies which have no connection with my duties.'

Occupying the position that he did, and being excessively proud of it, his circumspection had led him into taking a step of doubtful morality, and this was pointed out to him without any unnecessary delay by his daughter.

'I have just seen Mr. Mayne,' said she. 'Why did you not tell me that you had requested him to leave St. Albyn's? By his account you promised to do so.'

Dean Pemberton was a tall, stout, gray-headed personage, whose theological views were moderate, whose learning had sufficed for the production of a treatise upon the Council of Chalcedon, and who had been universally applauded for having neither added to nor taken away anything from the record of history with regard to that momentous synod. He firmly believed in his own integrity, but was a little afraid of his daughter, whose character he imperfectly comprehended; so that it seemed best to him to pause for a few moments and clear his voice impressively before replying:

'My dear child, let me in the first place ask you whether you think it was quite right or wise to enter into conversation with young Mayne upon the eve of your marriage to another, and, I may fairly add, a better man? I do not speak of the propriety or good taste of his returning here at such a time and addressing you. I am not, of course, answerable for his actions; but I do feel that I am to some extent answerable for yours.'

'And to a still greater extent for your own, I presume,' observed Ida composedly. 'Did you make that promise? If you did, it seems to me that you ought to have kept it.'

The Dean, like many other excellent men, always tried to bully when he was driven into a corner.

'Both your question and your manner of putting it are extremely disrespectful, Ida,' said he severely. 'I should be quite justified in declining to give you any answer; but I prefer to be frank with you. I certainly did suggest to young Mayne that he would do well to leave the place, inasmuch as his atten-

tions to you had begun to excite remark, and it was obvious that they could have no practical result. He expressed a wish that the cause of his departure should be made known to you, and I believe I assented, although I do not remember committing myself to an actual promise. After giving the question full and careful consideration, I decided to keep silence. I saw, with sincere pleasure, that your affections were otherwise engaged, and I was unwilling to disturb you by a communication which in itself had little importance. Your own good sense, I felt sure, must have convinced you that Arthur Mayne's attachment —supposing you to have been aware of it— was a mere boyish absurdity.'

'I was aware of it, and I did not regard it in that light,' said Ida.

The Dean was alarmed, and therefore assumed his most formidable demeanour.

'It is most painful to me to hear you say so,' he replied. 'Most painful and most surprising. I hope you do not wish me to understand that you have been guilty, even in

thought, of any treachery to your future husband.'

'I have not been guilty of treachery,' answered Ida, 'though it seems to me that you have. Mr. Chaine is as well aware as you are that I am not in love with him.'

'Ida, I cannot permit you to take up that tone with me. I had no reason in the world to doubt the sincerity of your affection for John Chaine, nor have I ever attempted to influence you in his favour. Your choice was made of your own free will, and in my opinion you are bound by every honourable and Christian principle to adhere to it.'

'Oh, I mean to adhere to it,' answered Ida, with a faint smile; 'you need not feel uneasy. Only I should not have accepted Mr. Chaine if you had delivered the message which you undertook to deliver — that is all.'

While she spoke, she kept her eyes upon her father's face, which indeed was an interesting study; for the Dean did not make a great success of his endeavour not to look

relieved. When he opened his lips, the sentiments to which he gave utterance were quite unexceptionable.

'My dear child,' said he, 'you misrepresent yourself. I am convinced of that, and I will not do you the injustice of taking what you say literally. At the same time, I trust that you will never dream of saying such things to any one else, because the world is only too ready to accept us at our own valuation. You are, I suppose, annoyed at my having omitted to give you a full report of my conversation with young Mayne, and I regret the omission, although I am unable to think that anybody has been injured by it. For my own part, I have no misgivings as to the choice which you have made, nor any doubt as to its promotion of your happiness. Since your dear mother's death I have done my best to fill her place, and I rejoice to think that I have acted as she would have wished me to act. If anything could console me for the solitude in which my remaining years must be spent, it would be the knowledge that my only child is under

the care of a man whom I can safely trust and whom I honestly esteem.'

Upon the conclusion of this harangue Ida silently retired. She had but an indistinct recollection of her mother and consequently could not tell how the deceased lady might have behaved under any given circumstances; but she knew her father well enough to know that no representations of hers would be likely to cause him a single pang of conscience. For her own satisfaction, she had chosen to inflict upon him a minute or two of the discomfort that he deserved; more than that she could not do, since she had made up her mind to marry John Chaine.

She did not, when she had left him, betake herself to her bedroom and give way to hysterical weeping, as many a girl would have done in her place, but busied herself in superintending the arrangements for the morrow's festivity. There was a good deal to be done; for the Dean had left everything to her and a formidable array of guests were expected to be present at the wedding breakfast; so that by

the time that she had given categorical instructions to a flustered butler and had counted the spoons and forks and paid a visit of inspection to the kitchen, only a few minutes remained to her in which to dress for dinner. The Dean did not like to be kept waiting for dinner, nor had she ever kept him waiting. She had been a good daughter to him, and if she had not been a very affectionate one, it must be owned that he had done remarkably little to earn her affection.

Nevertheless he was fond of her; he had done what he believed to be his duty by her, and on this last evening of their companionship he was disposed to be almost lachrymose. During dinner the presence of the servants compelled him to confine himself to commonplaces; but after he had his second glass of port at dessert, he sighed plaintively and remarked that the hand of Providence had fallen heavily upon him.

'Not that I repine. I should be most ungrateful were I to do that or to deny that many great blessings have been vouchsafed to

me. Yet I cannot help feeling, my dear Ida, that your gain is my loss and that henceforward I shall have little or nothing to look forward to except my release from this troublesome world.'

'I think Mrs. Mitchell will be able to make you comfortable,' said Ida calmly. 'Since my engagement I have made her do all the housekeeping, and she does not seem inclined to be extravagant. I have particularly impressed upon her that she must never send up kidneys for breakfast and that you cannot stand thick soup.'

The Dean was not sorry to hear that specific commands had been issued to his housekeeper; but he was stupid enough to aver that he cared nothing for creature comforts, and that what saddened him was the thought of a parting which must needs be more or less final. He enlarged upon this aspect of the situation for some little time, making free use of a certain break in the voice which he usually reserved for the most effective passages of his sermons; but it is not easy to preach to an

audience of one, and the difficulty is, of course, increased when the solitary auditor shows no sign of being moved. Dean Pemberton was not so very much more of a humbug than most people and did not suspect himself of being a humbug at all; but he was rather clumsy.

It was Ida's custom to bid him good-night on leaving the dining-room, and she did so now with neither more nor less of warmth than usual. Her day's work was not yet quite over, for she had to array herself in her bridal apparel and give some final orders to her maid; but when this was done she was free to lock herself into her bedroom and review her position, present and future. Neither was altogether agreeable to contemplate; but both—or at any rate she thought so — were the outcome of events beyond her control, and she was resolved to make the best of what was now past mending. John Chaine was to be her husband, and John Chaine, like Auld Robin Gray, was a very worthy sort of man. That he did not happen to be the man of her choice

was his misfortune, not his fault: perhaps it was no such very great misfortune after all, and she did not mean him to suffer for it. As for Arthur Mayne, she was not going to think about him any more. Then she went to bed and thought about him until her tears began to flow and sleep came to relieve her of all her sorrows for a few hours.

On the following morning Miss Pemberton awoke to a full sense of the ordeal that lay before her and nerved herself to face it without flinching. She had that kind of courage which is so common amongst women and so rare amongst men; she had no fear, and no reason to fear, that it would desert her in the present emergency; nor could her father repress a sigh of relief and admiration when she came downstairs in her white satin and Brussels lace and asked him composedly whether he was ready.

It had been arranged that the Dean should take no part in the marriage service. That impressive rite was to be solemnised by the Bishop of the diocese, assisted by several of

the cathedral clergy, and was to be performed with all the pomp befitting the place and the occasion. As Ida moved slowly up the nave upon her father's arm, to the strains of a triumphal march, composed by the organist in her honour, she was conscious of the eager scrutiny of hundreds of eyes; in the chancel were gathered together the invited guests—Chaines and Pembertons and collaterals who seemed to be as the sand of the sea-shore in number; upon the altar steps stood the red-haired, red-faced bridegroom, his hands hanging helplessly by his sides; for he had donned a frock-coat and consequently could not dispose of them by thrusting them into his pockets, as nature and habit would have prompted him to do. Ida noticed that his coat and neck-tie were blue, and wondered why men who are afflicted with red hair have such a misguided predilection for that colour. She also noticed that Lady Elizabeth Chaine wore a resplendent costume of ruby velvet; that Lord Hartlepool, Lady Elizabeth's nephew, was shifting uneasily from one foot

to the other, as if his patent leather boots pinched his corns; and that Canon Mayne had forgotten to put on a clean surplice. All these and other trivial details her downcast eyes contrived to take in; but what remained somewhat dim to her was the reality of the scene in which she occupied the most prominent part. Was it actually she herself, or somebody else, who repeated in that clear, steady voice the words dictated by the little old gentleman in the lawn sleeves? Was it Ida Pemberton who, in repeating those words, was being transformed by the law of the land and the sanction of the Church into Ida Chaine? Once or twice she felt an odd inclination to burst out laughing; but she did not give way to it, and everybody remarked how admirably she bore herself from start to finish.

As much could not be said for poor John Chaine, who stuttered and blundered and looked supremely ridiculous; however, one cannot fairly blame bridegrooms for looking ridiculous, nor had any one expected this

particular bridegroom to look otherwise. When he was given to understand that nothing further was required of him, and when the episcopal benediction had been bestowed upon the newly-married pair, Wilfrid, who was standing close behind him, was amused to hear him murmur fervently, 'Thank God!' It was a little early in the day, Wilfrid thought, to begin returning thanks.

Indeed, the victim had forgotten for the moment that he would shortly be called upon to return thanks after a more mundane fashion and in terms somewhat less concise. St. Albyn's, as beseemed a cathedral city, was in no haste to adopt modern customs; its denizens would have been shocked at the idea of people being married in the afternoon and would have considered a wedding scarcely a wedding unless it had been followed by an elaborate breakfast and half a dozen speeches. Breakfast, therefore, had been duly made ready at the Deanery, whither the company repaired after the signing of the register, and where

nothing was neglected that could tend to the increased discomfiture of a bashful hero. But John remarked to his sympathetic brother that he supposed he should pull through somehow or other; and somehow or other he did pull through, it being out of the question for him to take to his heels. His reply to the graceful and dignified oration in which the health of the bride and bridegroom was proposed was not, to be sure, very intelligible; but it had the merit of brevity, and everybody breathed more freely when he had brought it to an abrupt conclusion and had plumped down into his seat again.

'Now, that's what I call a real good speech,' remarked Hubert Chaine, who, much to his satisfaction, had been placed next to Violet Stanton. 'There was nothing to be said except "thank you," and, as far as I could make out, John didn't say much more. It has been a trying day for him, poor old chap; but I really don't think he has done so badly —do you?'

Miss Stanton shrugged her shoulders. 'I

haven't been watching your brother,' she answered; 'I have been watching his wife, who is a good deal more interesting. I suppose the day must have been at least as trying for her as it has been for him; but she has never turned a hair. What pluck that girl must have!'

The latter admiring ejaculation, which was uttered half-involuntarily, did not quite please Hubert, who rejoined: 'Oh, if you come to that, John isn't wanting in pluck. You can't call a man a funk for being shy; though, of course, he has no business to be shy at his age.'

'He is a great deal older than you, isn't he?' asked Violet, withdrawing her eyes for a moment from the bride, whose pale, impassive face had an irresistible fascination for her.

'Rather! So is Wilfrid, though he is better preserved than John. As for me, I'm only a sort of afterthought. I believe the nurseries at home had been permanently closed when I made my appearance upon the scene.'

'Ah; and I dare say you have been spoilt all your life—the youngest child always is.'

'Not in our family,' answered Hubert, shaking his head; 'my father doesn't believe in spoiling the child or sparing the rod either. I haven't forgotten the thrashing he gave me, when I was fourteen, for slipping off to the stables early one morning and taking out one of his hunters for a quiet little ride. The brute broke away with me and came no end of a crumpler over a wire fence. My mother thought we ought to praise Heaven for my miraculous escape, which was pretty much my own view; but the governor didn't see it in that light. He said praising Heaven was right enough; but disobedience must be repented of before we could proceed to thanksgiving. And he made me repent then and there with a hunting-crop.'

'And did he adopt the same system of kindly severity with your brothers?'

'Yes, I believe so. John caught it worse than Wilfrid, because John is a bit peppery, you know; but we've all had to go through

the mill. Well, it wasn't pleasant at the time; but I expect it did us a lot of good, and the result is tolerably satisfactory, I think. I won't say anything about myself; but I doubt whether you would find two better fellows in England, in their different ways, than John and Wilfrid.'

The girl laughed.

'You think most men good fellows, don't you?' she asked. 'You look as if you did. I wonder whether your sister-in-law thinks your eldest brother a good fellow?'

'She does if she knows anything about him. I don't mind telling you, between ourselves, that when I first joined I got into rather a mess about money, and old John saw me through out of his own pocket, without saying a word to anybody. That's John all over. He don't say much; but he's there when you want him.'

It occurred to Violet that there was some future danger of Mr. John Chaine's being there when his wife didn't want him; but she refrained from making so ungracious an

observation, and presently the break-up of the breakfast-party put an end to this fragmentary dialogue.

There was no very long delay in the drawing-room while the bride was changing her costume. The show was over; some of the spectators, who had perhaps found it fall short of their expectations in point of excitement, and who may have been a little disappointed, were anxious to get away; fat Lady Elizabeth was yawning undisguisedly; and the Dean, rather nervous and fidgety, as an affectionate father might well be at such a moment, was lending a courteous but somewhat inattentive ear to old Mr. Chaine, who had caught him by the elbow, and was pointing out that 'all this music and ceremonial' accorded ill with the traditions of the Reformed Church. Presently Ida appeared in her travelling-dress, which was in all respects worthy of the occasion; the Dean enfolded her in a farewell embrace, without apparently disturbing her perfect equanimity; a good deal of hand-shaking took place, and two

minutes later the wedded couple drove off to the railway station, pursued by a volley of rice which somebody had been thoughtful enough to hold in readiness.

'Do you know why a bad wife is better than a good one?' asked Wilfrid Chaine of his younger brother, who chanced to be standing close beside him in the doorway.

Hubert shook his head, remarking that he couldn't remember ever to have guessed a riddle.

'Because bad is the best, my dear boy. I feel sure that Mrs. John will prove the best of wives; but, for all that, I don't particularly want to stand in John's shoes.'

Then it was that Hubert made the first brilliant repartee with which he could have been credited in the whole course of his life.

'Don't you?' said he. 'Well, it's a funny thing; but, do you know, I always imagined that you did.'

CHAPTER V

WILFRID'S ANXIETIES

VERY soon after his daughter's departure Dean Pemberton was released from the burdensome task of entertaining an assemblage one half of which did not know the other half and did not wish to do so. Amongst all these people he had no intimates, nor did any of them care to linger under his roof now that the function of the day had been brought to an end. The cathedral folks went away on foot; others, who had come from a distance — including the whole of the Chaine Court guests — drove straight to the station to catch the up express; old Mr. Chaine and Lady Elizabeth were hoisted into their heavy yellow barouche; Hubert betook himself to the barracks to look up some acquaintances, while Wilfrid, having declined his father's

offer of a lift, started to walk home across the fields.

The stretch of undulating country—partly grazing land and partly given over to the cultivation of hops — which separated St. Albyn's from Chaine Court was pleasant enough to saunter over on that bright spring afternoon, when there was just enough of sharpness in the breeze to make the sunshine preferable to the shade, when the hedges and the woods were sprinkled with vivid green, and when a hundred trifling sights and sounds, familiar to dwellers in the country, testified to the approach of summer. But Wilfrid Chaine, who lived in London and was no great admirer of the beauties of Nature, took little notice of the landscape. He had other subjects to ponder over which, judging by the frown upon his brow, were both more important to him and less agreeable. For one thing, he had been a little disquieted by Hubert's insinuation that he was ambitious to supplant his elder brother. It was quite true that such had long been his desire and design ;

but he had not supposed that it was suspected by anybody, unless perhaps by his mother; and since it was one of his rules to stand as well as possible with all the world, he was displeased with himself, feeling that he must have been guilty of some unconscious clumsiness.

For the rest, Hubert was not a very influential personage, nor, considering that there was no entail, was it so unpardonable on his own part to cherish schemes which, if successful, would probably prove to be of benefit in the long run to an ancient and distinguished family. John, it was quite certain, would never distinguish himself. The very best thing that could happen to John would be to inherit a modest but sufficient income and a few hundred acres of land, as a preservative against the mischief which Satan finds for idle hands to do. Other people's requirements are larger; other people must have, or at any rate ought to have, greater sums of ready money at their disposal, and those who look forward to a Parliamentary and Ministerial career are

heavily handicapped by straitened means. These observations Wilfrid made to himself merely by way of a rehearsal for any public excuses which he might subsequently be called upon to utter: it was not necessary for him to set himself right with his conscience, because he had been able in early youth to put an effectual extinguisher upon that inward accuser. There are all kinds of sinners in this sinful world, and Wilfrid Chaine belonged to the restricted and fortunate number who sin quite contentedly with their eyes open. He had absolutely no religious convictions; he was clever enough to have discovered that people who profess to be religious are little, if at all, better than their neighbours, although they steer clear of certain kinds of immorality; he was persuaded that Christianity was an absurd delusion, kept alive partly by the superstition of the masses, partly by the exertions of those interested in maintaining its authority, and he thought it extremely doubtful whether man has any existence beyond this present one. He kept his opinions

to himself out of the regard which he entertained for social prejudices; but the natural result of them was, of course, that he knew no other standard of conduct than that of expediency. Now, it was clearly expedient that he should oust that useless fellow John from his position of heir-apparent — or, to speak more correctly, of heir-presumptive—and by hook or by crook he meant to do it.

Yet this was not quite so simple a task as it might have been pronounced to be at first sight. He had, it was true, both his parents on his side; but one of them was a ticklish person to deal with. In some ways Mr. Chaine was easily deceived; but he was no fool, nor was he at all the sort of man to whom covert suggestions could be made with safety. The chances were that he had already executed a will in John's favour, and, in his precarious state of health, it was by no means improbable that he might die without altering it. Therefore Wilfrid, as he wended his way across the well-managed property of which he

hoped to be the owner some day, was pensive and sorrowful. He had, moreover, certain troubles of his own to disturb him, which will be dwelt upon later.

Presently he came in sight of Chaine Court, a beautiful old Tudor building, sheltered from the north and east by wooded hills and fronted by a broad terrace, whence the lawn sloped gently down to meet the park. Here for generation after generation had dwelt the head of the Chaine family, and hence, urged on by the ambition which was one of the characteristics of their race, had issued forth many a stout soldier and sailor to win his spurs and fight his country's battles. Wilfrid had inherited the ambition of his ancestors; but some unfortunate strain of blood had denied him their honesty and singleness of purpose. As he stood gazing at their birthplace and his own, his thoughts were concerned rather with the revenues that belonged to it than with the traditions which had made it famous; and although he was determined to be as great a man as any Chaine had ever been, he did not

in the least care whether he achieved that distinction by fair means or foul.

'Time and I against any other two,' he murmured, quoting a statesman who was, perhaps, not much more scrupulous than he. 'But the question is whether I am going to be allowed the time.' He shook his shoulders and sighed. 'Meanwhile,' he continued, 'the first thing to be done is to get a little money out of the governor—which won't be easy. I wonder whether he would believe me if I told him that I had been spending rather too much on charity of late. Probably not; he would not shrink from the incivility of asking to see the receipts. A better plan would be to admit remorsefully that living in London and frequenting the highest society has been too much for my modest resources. If there is a shade of weakness anywhere in the governor's character, it is a weakness for the highest society.'

There was not much weakness in Wilfrid's character, nor had he the faintest respect for the social standing of one man rather than

another. In his estimation, the worth of any given individual was simply the worth of that individual to him; and as at this moment he thought that his mother might do him some service, he hastened on to the house, where, as he had expected, he found her drinking tea all by herself in her boudoir.

Probably Lady Elizabeth had been indulging in forty winks, for she started and rubbed her eyes when her son entered.

'My dear boy,' said she, 'how nice of you to come in and enliven my solitude! Have a cup of tea and a muffin?'

'No, thank you,' answered Wilfrid, as he dropped into a low chair. 'But I'll have a glass of sherry, if that is procurable without sending to ask my father for the keys.'

'Of course it is procurable. Ring the bell and order what you want; your father has gone to lie down and rest after the fatigues of the day. Well, what did you think of it all? It struck me that John played his part with very tolerable decency.'

'Oh, yes; there was no hitch, and if he goes on as he has begun there never will be any. Only he won't go on as he has begun. There could not be in the world two people more fatally destined to quarrel than John and his wife.'

'I hope they won't,' said Lady Elizabeth uneasily. 'Quarrels are such a nuisance!'

Wilfrid smiled. He thought that a quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. John Chaine might not be to his own disadvantage; but he was careful not to say anything of that sort to the good-natured lady who believed him to be as well-meaning as herself. He only remarked: 'Let us hope that they won't. I quite agree with you that quarrels are an abominable nuisance; and what makes me feel that all the more painfully just now is that I expect I am in for a quarrel with my father.'

'For goodness' sake,' exclaimed Lady Elizabeth in consternation, 'don't be so insane as to get yourself into trouble with him just as he is beginning to come round to the idea that John would be happier as a gentle-

man farmer than as head of the house! What is it about?'

Wilfrid made a grimace. 'I've been outrunning the constable, that's all,' he replied. 'Oh, I know what you are going to say, my dear mother, but I really can't dip into your pin-money again. Besides, I'm afraid I want rather more this time than you could possibly spare.'

'I could let you have forty or fifty pounds,' Lady Elizabeth began eagerly.

'No use,' replied her son, with a shake of his head. 'Unfortunately, I owe about four times that amount, and I shall have to make a clean breast of it sooner or later. It isn't altogether my own fault——'

'I am *sure* it isn't!' Lady Elizabeth interrupted emphatically. 'He ought, of course, to make you a larger allowance; but you know how tiresome he is about these things.'

'I do, indeed; and I know that there is only one person who can make him less so. I was thinking that perhaps you might just put in a word for me and prepare his mind.'

Poor Lady Elizabeth's blue eyes became very round, and the corners of her mouth dropped. She did not much relish the task assigned to her; but, since she could refuse Wilfrid nothing, she replied, not over hopefully:

'I will do what I can; but he is sure to be displeased. It isn't that he will grudge the money—only he will want to know exactly why and how you have exceeded your allowance. Could you mention any particular reason?'

'None that he would consider sufficient, I am afraid. We had better confine ourselves to generalities.'

Lady Elizabeth gave it to be understood that she placed little reliance upon the persuasive force of generalities; but she promised to do her best, and Wilfrid knew that she would keep her promise. That she had done so, and that she had not been rewarded by any brilliant success, was apparent to him when the dinner-hour came, and when his father brought a grave and forbidding countenance downstairs.

Hubert had despatched a messenger from St. Albyn's to announce that he had been retained by the 22d Hussars, whose guest-night it happened to be; so that only three persons sat down in the vast and somewhat gloomy dining-hall at Chaine Court, and as two of them felt guilty and uncomfortable, while the third remained obstinately taciturn, they did not greatly enjoy one another's society.

As soon as Lady Elizabeth had left the room, Mr. Chaine proceeded straight to the point by saying:

'I am very sorry to hear that you have incurred debts, Wilfrid. You cannot be ignorant of the views which I hold upon that subject. To my mind, a man who induces tradespeople to supply him with what he cannot pay for is neither more nor less than a thief.'

'That is quite true, sir,' answered Wilfrid sorrowfully. 'I entirely agree with you, and I haven't a word to say in excuse for myself. I have hoped, as you know, to enter political

life, and I have wasted my time and my small resources in preparing for a career which is really not open to younger sons. However, I trust that I shall never again have to ask you to help me out of my difficulties. I have lived and learnt, and, as I have no profession, I now see that I must look to the Stock Exchange or to commerce for a means of making myself independent.'

Mr. Chaine frowned. 'No member of our family has ever been engaged in trade,' said he. 'I do not sneer at trade, which I recognise as the chief source of England's greatness; but I have always held, and I always shall hold, that those whom it has pleased God to send into the world as gentlemen should not lower themselves by meddling with it.'

'Quite so,' answered Wilfrid. 'But what is an impoverished gentleman to do? Of course I don't want to be a tinker or a tailor; but isn't it better for me to be that than to be a perpetual burden upon my father?'

'I make you a large allowance,' returned Mr. Chaine doggedly. 'It is larger than that

which younger sons usually receive, because—well, at any rate, you will admit that it is larger. And why, may I ask, do you find it insufficient?'

Wilfrid explained. The cost of living in London was much higher than it had been in former days: everybody spent more, and if he was expected to associate with men of fortune, he could scarcely help expending about a fourth of what they did. Nevertheless, he did not for one moment deny that his position was a false one and that it was his duty to relinquish it. In the long run he got the best of an animated discussion; for Mr. Chaine, who would not for any earthly consideration have been the father of a mercantile son, consented to pay his outstanding debts and to give him an extra hundred a year for the future. The terms offered were not magnificent; but it seemed prudent to close with them.

'Anyhow,' reflected Wilfrid, 'I get two hundred, or perhaps two hundred and fifty, down, and he hasn't thought of asking to see

the receipted bills, thank goodness! It might be a little difficult to supply him with them, considering that I don't owe a farthing.'

It was the fact that he owed no more than he could easily pay to his tradesmen: nevertheless, he was in urgent need of funds; and if he had forgotten that, he would have been reminded of it on the morrow, when he reached the rooms which he occupied in St. James's Street and found, amongst other letters, one addressed in a feminine hand which was only too familiar to him. This missive was signed 'Jessie,' and contained a request that he would call upon his correspondent *immediately*, as she *must* see him. It was very emphatic, not very legible, and bore marks of having been composed under circumstances of no slight agitation.

'I thought as much,' muttered Wilfrid, when he had perused and burnt it. 'Well, I suppose I must go, though this sort of thing is becoming a horrible bore. One comfort is that I shan't have to go empty-handed.'

He lunched at his club, and afterwards had

himself driven to a remote and melancholy district beyond the Edgware Road, known as Maida Vale. Here (for he was a man who never neglected precautions) he dismissed his hansom and proceeded on foot as far as a somewhat shabby row of houses, of which the corner one bore the inscription of Wellington Terrace. Having rung the bell at No. 5, and having ascertained from the grimy maid-of-all-work who opened the door that Mrs. Viccars was at home, he was shown into a scantily-furnished parlour, where a tall, fine-looking woman, whose masses of red-brown hair and creamy complexion gave her a claim to beauty which was in part contradicted by the coarseness of her features, was sitting, with her hands before her, doing nothing.

She started up and hurled herself into her visitor's arms almost before the door had been closed behind him.

'Oh, Wilfrid,' she exclaimed, 'I am so glad you have come! I was afraid you wouldn't.'

'My dear girl,' answered Wilfrid, after

extricating himself from an embrace which apparently did not afford him unmixed delight, 'I came as soon as I could; I always do. Yesterday, as I think I told you, I had to show myself down at St. Albyn's at my brother's wedding. I only received your note on my return this morning, so that I can't fairly be accused of having lost time.'

'Oh, I knew you couldn't be here before this afternoon,' Mrs. Viccars said; 'but you have disappointed me so often that I hardly dared to count upon you. And I have something to tell you which——'

'I know you have,' interrupted Wilfrid, smiling; 'you have told me of it once or twice before, you know. Well, this time I am happy to say that I have something to give you, which is far more to the purpose.'

He drew a cheque from his pocket and handed it to her.

'Extorted from the governor with some difficulty,' he remarked. 'May it make you and the butcher and the baker and the grocer

happy! I am sorry that you have had to wait so long for it; but allowances must be made for a poverty-stricken younger son.'

Mrs. Viccars took the slip of paper, glanced at it and tossed it aside, flushing slightly. It was easy to see that she did not enjoy the advantage of an equable temper, and that the donor's manner irritated her.

'Anybody would think, to hear you, that I was in the habit of pestering you for money,' she said resentfully. 'I can't live without it —I'm sure I wish I could—but you must confess that I am not extravagant, and it wasn't to get money out of you that I asked you to come here.'

'I beg your pardon,' answered Wilfrid, still smiling; 'judging by the light of previous experience, I supposed that it was.'

The woman's eyes blazed. She was evidently upon the point of making some angry retort; but she checked herself and, with a sudden change of voice, said:

'Don't quarrel with me to-day, Wilfrid! I want it to be a happy day, for I have a great

piece of good news to give you. Richard Viccars is dead.'

No one knew better than Wilfrid Chaine how to conceal his emotions ; but, perfect as his self-control was, his countenance fell for an instant, and she saw that it fell. He did not, however, allow the smile to fade from his lips, and it was in the same light, half-mocking tone which he had used throughout their interview that he remarked :

'Your glee may be natural, my dear Jessie ; but it would be more decent to draw a thin veil over it. After all, the deceased was your husband.'

'I am not a hypocrite,' returned Mrs. Viccars shortly ; 'and if I were, there wouldn't be much use in my being hypocritical with you. It was you who persuaded me to leave Richard ; you know that he never was anything to me, and you know what good reasons I had for wishing him dead. But I never thought he would die — a great strong man like that ! It seems that he caught a chill and neglected it.'

'Very imprudent of him,' observed Wilfrid; 'a man who neglects a chill deserves the worst. All the same, I must confess that I don't see what particular reason you had for wishing him dead. He really hasn't troubled you any more since you deserted him than if he had been in his grave.'

'You say these things to madden me, Wilfrid! You almost make me hate you when you talk in that way, although I know you can't be speaking seriously. Were you speaking seriously, I wonder, when you told me—as you have done a hundred times—that you would marry me if I were free? Sometimes I think—but no; I *won't* think that! For you are not cruel, Wilfrid, whatever else you may be.'

He was cruel, and the poor woman knew very well that he was, although she loved him in spite of his cruelty. She knew also, or at any-rate she feared, that he had not, and had never had, the slightest intention of making her his wife. Asking him to do that was much the same thing as asking him to ruin himself; for

it was impossible to suppose that such an alliance would be sanctioned or tolerated by his family. The daughter of a St. Albyn's tradesman, she had made Wilfrid Chaine's acquaintance during his boyhood, and there had been certain callow love-passages between them which had been interrupted when he had gone to Oxford. The memory of these had not deterred her from marrying Richard Viccars, a well-to-do London tailor; but chance had brought about a renewal of her intimacy with the handsome young gentleman whom she had always adored, and his representations or her own wilfulness had at length led her to break with a husband upon whom, for one reason or another, she had looked down. She had not made home comfortable for her husband, nor had he been at the pains of inquiring what had become of her or seeking to obtain a divorce from her. Wilfrid—not without pulling a wry face over it—had provided her with the means of subsistence, had kept up a connection of which he was only too obviously weary, and had no doubt stated from time to

time that, if she were a widow, he would make such reparation as he could to her by giving her the right to bear his name; but whether, now that she was a widow, he would prove as good as his word was quite another question. She did not think that he would, unless she could carry her point by a *coup de main*, and that was why she had summoned him in such haste. All this was plainly legible upon her face, from which he had not removed his calm, scrutinising gaze.

'You are in a desperate hurry, Jessie,' he remarked. 'Isn't it usual for widows to wait at least a year before contracting a second marriage?'

'I dare say it is,' she returned; 'but our case is not a usual one, and I am sick to death of the miserable life that I have had to lead since I came here. No one will think the worse of us for putting an end to it at once and for ever.'

'Oh! excuse me, my father would think a great deal the worse of us; and, as matters stand at present, we can't afford to defy my father.

I assure you that he is perfectly capable of cutting off the supplies and leaving us to starve.'

'Then we must keep our marriage secret. Such things have been done before now.'

'Yes; but the secret has almost invariably leaked out. No, my dear Jessie, we mustn't behave like a couple of lunatics. We must have patience, and probably we shall not be called upon for a very prolonged display of that virtue. My father, I am sorry to say, is breaking up fast.'

Mrs. Viccars had sources of information which enabled her to recognise the truth of that assertion. She was aware that old Mr. Chaine's days were numbered; she was aware also that there was a fair chance of his nominating his second son as his heir, and she could not but admit the folly of placing so fine a prospect in jeopardy.

'If only I could trust you, Wilfrid!' she exclaimed involuntarily.

'Have I ever given you reason to distrust me?' asked Wilfrid, concealing his relief under

a show of indignation. 'I haven't always been able to give you as much money as you have asked for; but you know how strictly I am called to account for every penny that I spend, and I think you ought to know that I have run some risk in demanding the cheque which I have just handed over to you. If I were inclined to distrust you—but I am not—I might suspect you of caring more to be Mrs. Wilfrid Chaine than you care for me.'

'I care for nothing more than I care for you, Wilfrid,' Mrs. Viccars returned, with the tears in her eyes. 'I care for nothing half as much. But I have a right to be your wife.'

'Ah, my dear,' said Wilfrid, who perceived that he had won the day, 'if we all had our rights, this world would be a much more comfortable place than it is. But some of us know that our only chance of ever getting them is to wait; and, as I told you before, I don't think that you and I are likely to be kept waiting long.'

One of them was likely to be kept waiting until the end of her life; but as she was a

woman, as she had a passionate nature, and as she was still in love, she could not bring herself to face that obvious probability. So, instead of giving utterance to sundry menaces which she had been holding in reserve all this time, she took Wilfrid's head between her hands and kissed his forehead, murmuring assurances which he had once upon a time found sweet. At all events, he had professed to find them so, and he courageously renewed his professions now, notwithstanding his detestation of the powerful perfume wherewith Mrs. Viccars was wont to impregnate her person.

CHAPTER VI

MR. WICKS'S MARE

As a general rule, men are, of course, men, and women are women; but from time to time one comes across cases which, to the superficial observer, look very like a mistake of gender on Nature's part. Feminine men are, unhappily, not as rare as they ought to be; while masculine women are in these days only too willing to exhibit themselves, on platforms and elsewhere, before the eyes of a dismayed world. It would be doing Miss Violet Stanton a gross injustice to compare her with these terrible persons, but many people concurred in the opinion which she herself often expressed—that her tastes and attributes were ill-suited to her sex. To be fond of horses, to know a good deal about them, and to have courage enough to go straight across country

upon an animal of doubtful pedigree — these are no matters of reproach to any woman; but perhaps the old ladies of St. Albyn's were not altogether wrong when they shook their heads and said that a girl ought not to assume absolute control over her mother. On the other hand, it may be urged that a mother who does not know how to maintain authority over her daughter must be so poor a creature as to deserve all the inconvenient consequences of her feebleness; and it is only just to the old ladies of St. Albyn's to add that they fully recognised this fact in their strictures upon Mrs. and Miss Stanton.

On the morning after John Chaine's wedding, the former said, somewhat querulously, to the latter, who had come down to breakfast, arrayed in her riding-habit—

'I did hope, Violet, that there was to be no more of this scampering about on horseback until the autumn. Didn't you tell me that that beast had been turned out to grass?'

'That beast,' replied Violet composedly, 'will be kept upon green food for a long time

to come. It's a pity; but it can't be helped. I am not going to ride that beast to-day; I am going to take out a mare belonging to Wicks, who has asked me to educate her for him. A very nice mare, as far as I could judge by looking at her; but whether she can be made to jump or not is what I must try to find out.'

'Really, Violet,' said Mrs. Stanton, 'it is not at all the right thing for you to be breaking in a job-master's horses. I don't like your associating with such people.'

'Wicks is all right,' answered Violet. 'He is a wonderfully honest man for a horse-dealer; and if I can get a ride free of expense, why shouldn't I take it? Besides, he doesn't propose to accompany me, so that I shan't be contaminated by his society.'

'That is just it, my dear—you have no business to ride about alone. I have told you so a hundred times——'

'And a hundred times,' interrupted Violet, as if that settled the matter, 'I have told you that it is all right. Moreover, I don't mean

to take the mare down the High Street; it wouldn't suit me to have her flinging her heels through a plate-glass window—so Mrs. Pickersgill won't see me.'

'I'm sure I hope she won't!' sighed her mother plaintively.

The generality of mothers might have felt some uneasiness as to the probable conduct of a mare who was pronounced capable of breaking plate-glass windows; but Mrs. Stanton was free from any anxiety upon that score. She had that confidence in her daughter's equestrian abilities which belongs to complete ignorance of the conditions whereby such abilities are liable to be tested, and she was a great deal more afraid of gossip than of the ugliest bit of timber or bullfinch in the county. Violet never had a fall; or, if she did, she never mentioned the circumstance on her return from hunting.

Nevertheless, the appearance of Mr. Wicks's mare—a huge, rawboned chestnut—might have inspired a nervous lady with some justi-

fiable sensations of disquietude. The stable-helper who was leading her up and down when Violet emerged from the front-door, touched his forelock, and said—

'If you please, miss, I was to say as Mr. Wicks 'd be very 'appy to go with you if you should wish it. The mare's a bit fresh, you see, miss; and she ain't carried a lady afore —not as we knows on.'

'I don't want him,' answered Violet; 'if I can't ride the mare, I'm quite sure he can't. Do you never take her out in anything except a snaffle?'

'Well, miss,' answered the man, 'Mr. Wicks, he did try her on the curb; but she give him a deal o' trouble, and she's that tender-mouthed a hinfant might 'old her. And I think, if I was you, miss,' he added, 'I shouldn't attempt for to 'it her, nor yet touch her with the spur. She's got some blood in her, you may depend.'

'And a temper?' suggested Violet, who was now in the saddle.

'No, miss, I don't believe so—not without

you was to make her fight you. And you knows too much for to try that on.'

Violet, at all events, knew enough to know that if she had a pleasant ride before her, it would only be on sufferance. The great, slashing animal upon whom her light weight could have no sobering influence, might not, perhaps, be able to unseat her, but could certainly overpower her at any moment, and such schooling as might be gone through that day would assuredly be submitted to to please her, not because she commanded it. This conviction, however, did not alarm Miss Stanton; for indeed she was not easily alarmed. She patted and talked to the mare, who seemed quite amiably disposed and who carried her without shying or plunging through the few streets which had to be traversed before the open country could be reached. But, as everybody knows, it is one thing to jog along the high road and another to canter across the turf; and no sooner did Mr. Wicks's mare find herself upon a broad expanse of pasture than she gave her rider to understand that

cantering was not a pace for which she had any fancy.

Violet, graciously conceding what could not be refused, let her have her head. It was safe galloping ground, she might scour it in every direction as long as it pleased her to do so, and if she got tired of it she was very welcome to leave it by jumping the posts and rails which were its boundaries: for the present there was nothing to be done with her, except to sit upon her back. So for about a quarter of an hour the mare thoroughly enjoyed herself. Not being interfered with, she displayed no ill-temper; she had one or two looks at the posts and rails, apparently did not care about them, and continued to gallop at the top of her speed in an irregular circle until her lungs and limbs had had sufficient play to satisfy her. Then she pulled up suddenly, stretched her neck, shook her head, and said as plainly as she could speak, 'That will do very nicely for this morning, thank you. Now I am going home to my stable.'

She accordingly trotted off in a quiet, de-

termined manner towards the five-barred gate through which she had effected her entrance, and which her rider had, of course, shut.

Now, Violet had no intention whatever of reopening that gate. She had plenty of patience, as well as a tolerably strong will, and it seemed to her that the time had now come to exhibit these valuable qualities. If the mare chose to clear the gate, well and good; but she foresaw that the mare would do nothing of the sort, and the event justified her prevision. A first refusal, conveyed in a manner emphatic enough to have unseated many riders, was followed by a prompt declaration of war, and during the next five minutes she had all her work cut out for her. She stuck to her saddle and did not lose her head, notwithstanding the vigorous initiation of hostilities in the shape of bucking and kicking adopted by her antagonist; but she had had sufficient experience to be aware that her powers of coercion were strictly limited. Any man or woman can put a horse at a fence; but to get him over it against his will

is a feat which can only be accomplished under conditions which were absent in this particular instance; and that is why Violet wisely abstained from the use of whip or spur. When two obstinate wills come into collision odds may safely be laid upon dogged persistency—which was the method that commended itself to Miss Violet Stanton.

'Very well, my dear,' said she to her mount, 'we have the best part of the day before us, and nothing prevents us from spending it as we please. You won't beat me, and you won't get rid of me, unless you lie down. Even if you do lie down, you will have to get up again, when you will find that gate exactly where it is now.'

The mare responded by squealing and flinging up her heels as high as she could, while Violet sat back and didn't care. Then there was a pause, and then there was another gentle request on the part of the rider, answered by a vehement refusal on the part of the beast. This performance was renewed again and again, without the slightest symptom of yielding on

either side, and it is impossible to say what the ultimate issue would have been if Hubert Chaine, mounted upon one of his father's steady cobs, had not chanced to come jogging along the lane which adjoined the scene of conflict. He took off his hat when he recognised the little lady on the big chestnut and said:

'I'm afraid you're having some trouble, aren't you? I can't offer to give you a lead, because my beast isn't capable of clearing a flower-bed; but I'll undertake yours, if you'll let me.'

His offer was somewhat scornfully declined.

'Thank you,' answered Violet; 'but it is I who have undertaken this job, and I mean to go through with it. My mare has bolted with me once and done all she knew to get me out of the saddle since. Now she must be taught that she can't have everything her own way.'

Alas for the impotency of brave words! These doubtless have their use when it is a question of dealing with human beings; but the brute creation, though quicker to acknow-

ledge a master than we are, has to be reduced to subserviency by other and less boastful means. Violet should have known better, and did in truth know better, than to have recourse to the spur; but the presence of a spectator of her own species and a not unnatural desire to show what she could do led her into hurrying matters injudiciously, so that she lost a battle which she might possibly have won by perseverance. For the rest, it must be admitted that her defeat was by no means an ignominious one. Hubert Chaine, who watched with admiration, not unmixed with considerable anxiety, the desperate struggle that ensued, declared afterwards that he had never in his life seen a lady sit or ride half so well; it was no fault of hers that her physical strength was not equal to that of a powerful quadruped. He abstained from intervention, though much tempted to intervene, until he saw that the girl was completely exhausted, when he said decisively:

'This can't go on any longer, Miss Stanton.

In another minute or two you'll simply faint and roll off.'

'The mare shall jump that gate if I die for it,' returned Violet breathlessly, but resolutely.

'All right; she shall jump the gate, only it's time for a fresh man to take a turn at her. Now, if you'll allow me to help you down, I'll just change the saddles.'

The fact was that Violet was in no condition to disobey him. She protested, she expressed her firm conviction that he would not succeed where she had failed, and she showed no sort of gratitude to him for his assistance; but her head was swimming, she was aching in every limb, and she could not help acknowledging that, so far as she was concerned, the mare had won the day. Hubert opened the gate, led his cob into the field and shifted the saddles with the dexterity and expedition of one who knew what he was about, while Miss Stanton was fain to seat herself upon an adjacent bank and await the fulfilment of her prophecy.

She did not know—how could she?—that the young man who proposed to accomplish a feat which she had attempted in vain was one of the best cross-country riders in England; nor perhaps could Hubert himself have explained by what mysterious means he contrived to impart that knowledge to the animal that he bestrode. But the mare knew at once that she had found her master, and, although her blood was up, she capitulated, as mares and horses sometimes will, at a moment's notice. Hubert rode her away for some little distance, brought her back towards the gate at his own pace and lifted her over it without the least visible effort. She landed rather clumsily and was almost on her nose; but the devil was cast out of her, and she only stretched herself and gave a great sigh of relief as her rider dismounted.

And now it was that Violet proved herself above the petty and ignoble sentiments which are often asserted to be characteristic of her sex. What had happened was not altogether agreeable to her, inasmuch as it cast an in-

evitable reflection upon her skill in the management of horses; but she was just enough and generous enough to say, without hesitation:

'You did that splendidly. I only wish I could understand *how* you did it!'

'Oh, well,' answered the young fellow, with a laugh, 'a change of saddles and riders often makes a lot of difference. One can't exactly say why it should; but it does. The fact of the matter was that you did all the hard work and I reaped the benefit. The mare was game to go on contending against you for a bit; but when she found that there were two of us to beat, she showed her sense by turning it up. All the same, I shouldn't keep her if I were you: she evidently hasn't had any training as a hunter, and she ought to carry double your weight.'

'She doesn't belong to me,' replied Violet, who fully appreciated the modesty of this speech; 'she belongs to a livery-stable keeper, who asked me to try her for him. I still think I should have carried my point if I

could have held out for another quarter of an hour; but I couldn't have held out for another quarter of an hour, and you know I couldn't. Well, I am much obliged to you for coming to my help, and I think it is very pretty of you not to brag about it.'

She accompanied these words by a smile which, so to speak, laid Hubert Chaine prostrate at her feet. He had thought Miss Stanton a very nice girl at the garden-party; he was now persuaded that she had not her equal in the whole world. What more could any young hussar require of a woman than that she should be pretty, brave, honest, an excellent horsewoman and a perfect little lady? That Violet Stanton was all of these things he firmly believed, nor, it may be added, did he ever surrender that belief; yet he was to discover, in the sequel, that he did require something further of her — so unhappily true is it that the more we get the more we want. For the time being, he was very well satisfied with her as she was; especially when she kindly consented to let

him ride the mare back to St. Albyn's and to perform the return journey herself upon the broad back of old Mr. Chaine's staid cob.

'It isn't that the mare would be at all too much for you,' he was careful to explain; 'but it's hardly worth while to shift the saddles a second time.'

So this pair proceeded towards the old cathedral city together upon terms of much amity, and the talk with which they beguiled the way was not such as the most rigid chaperon could have objected to. It is quite possible, and not so very difficult, for two young persons of opposite sexes, both of whom are addicted to out-door pursuits, to converse together after a friendly fashion, without thought of love-making; and although Hubert was already in love, he did not intimate that such was the case, while Violet was altogether fancy-free. Their discourse was of horses, and of nothing else, until the time came for them to part, when Hubert made so bold as to say that he hoped they might meet again before long.

'That,' replied Miss Stanton, 'will depend entirely upon you. As for me, I'm a permanent fixture at St. Albyn's.'

'Ah, I'm not!' observed the young man rather sorrowfully; 'I've got to go back to duty to-morrow. But I suppose you are sometimes up in London for a bit, aren't you?'

Violet shook her head.

'Never for more than a couple of days at a time,' she answered. 'We are poverty-stricken people, and we can't afford to amuse ourselves.'

'Well, then, I must take first leave and spend it at home, that's all,' rejoined Hubert, with much ingenuousness.

Violet laughed as she shook hands with him, and it was not until he had ridden nearly as far as Chaine Court that he divined the possible cause of her amusement.

CHAPTER VII

LEONARD FRASER

Marriages, according to the dictum of some extraordinary optimist, are made in heaven: in England, at all events, they are supposed to be made only by the free will and inclination of the contracting parties; and, upon that assumption, our practice (which, by the way, is already becoming old-fashioned) of spending the honeymoon away from home would seem to be a fairly reasonable one. But it is asserted by those who should be in a position to speak with authority upon the subject that the first month of matrimony, when passed in this way, is apt to be found a little trying even by two united lovers; and one may conjecture, without possessing any very vivid powers of imagination, what the ordeal of it must be to one of two united

persons who does not happen to be in love. Such, as we know, was the deplorable, though merited, predicament of Mrs. John Chaine, whose reminiscences of Northern Italy and Switzerland will prevent her from ever revisiting those countries.

It was not that she had any complaint to make against her husband, who proved himself to be in all respects what she had expected him to be; but reality, unfortunately, is never quite the same thing as anticipation, nor in truth had she thought much about the extreme difficulty of keeping up conversation with him all day long. This, which sounds like a small matter, was really her chief source of unhappiness. With her eyes open and with a full knowledge of what she was doing, she had decided to take the great leap; she was willing to forgive John for adoring her, disagreeable though his adoration was, and she meant to be as good a wife to him as she could be; but as for making a friend of him, that was no less beyond her power than it was beyond his to participate

in her tastes and feelings. The art treasures of Genoa, Milan, and Venice, the cathedrals, the picture-galleries, and the 'correggiosity of Correggio' were to him unmitigated nuisances; he neither knew nor cared about such things; nor, being a very honest sort of man, would he pretend that he did. Also he had not the slightest ear for music and could not go to the opera without falling asleep and snoring scandalously. Now Ida, as it happened, was an enthusiastic lover of music and had some smattering acquaintance with the history and canons of art, whereas her ignorance of the results of peasant proprietorship and the métayer system, as well as of all other methods of cultivating the soil, was profound and complete. She could not, therefore, help yawning when John poked his head out of the railway-carriage window and discoursed learnedly upon the economical value of the landscape, while he returned the compliment when she drew his attention to the outline of the snow-covered Alps, hanging like clouds above the distant blue haze of the Lombard

plain. She was, in short, bored to death; and poor John was bored too, although he was not perhaps aware of it.

'It's all very pretty and romantic and unlike what one has been accustomed to,' he remarked to his wife, one evening, when they were gliding down the Grand Canal at Venice in a gondola; 'but I do pity the unfortunate beggars who are condemned to live in such a country. Some of them, of course, have to work; but what on earth can the others manage to do by way of amusing themselves? There's no hunting for them, no shooting worth speaking of—nothing! Dear me, how thankful one ought to be that one was born an Englishman!'

'I dare say Italy suits the Italians as well as England suits the English,' said Ida. 'Why shouldn't we return to England, since we have such a lively appreciation of its advantages?'

But John replied quite seriously that he didn't think that would do. They had undertaken a tour of four or six weeks, and it would be better for them to adhere to their

programme. Besides, if she was enjoying herself, he was satisfied.

He had little ground for satisfaction on that score; but she considerately abstained from telling him so. She likewise abstained, after the first few days, from asking him to dine at the table d'hôte. For one thing, he hated eating his food in public, and, for another, he objected to her entering into conversation with the strangers who chanced to sit near her. Possibly he was jealous, possibly he was only shy; it did not much matter what he was, and it certainly was not worth while to cross him. Nevertheless, the labour of entertaining him from morning to night, without extraneous assistance of any kind, was well-nigh unendurable. Venice was a dead failure; the Italian lakes were a shade better, because there John could stretch his limbs and exert his muscles by pulling his wife about in a boat; but the weather was hot, the tourists and the mosquitoes were troublesome, and what pleasure could be derived from exquisite scenery in the company of one for

whom scenery possessed a purely agricultural interest?

But everything comes to an end sooner or later, and at Geneva Ida's heart was gladdened by a deprecating suggestion from her husband that they should set their faces northward. On his arrival he had found a number of letters awaiting him — some of which had seemed to give him a good deal of bother— and he now explained that there were difficulties in the way of his remaining any longer absent from home.

'You see, my father isn't well enough to look after things, and unless one of us is upon the spot, there's sure to be trouble. Here's one of our oldest tenants, for instance, talking about throwing up his farm. I don't suppose he really means it; still, it would be better for me to see him, if I could; and there are lots of other small matters which ought to be disposed of. So, as the White House is quite ready for us, I thought that, if you didn't mind——'

'I should prefer it,' interrupted Ida quickly.

'I hope you will always make whatever arrangements you may think best, without considering me. I really don't much care for one place more than another; but, for choice, I would rather be in Southshire than in Switzerland.'

Nothing could have been more accommodating, and John was very properly ashamed of himself for feeling chilled by her indifference. After all, he had no right to expect that she should shed tears over the termination of what had been meant to do duty for a happy holiday. It had not been much of a holiday, nor had it been as happy as it ought to have been—he did not disguise those unfortunate facts from himself.

However, he felt a good deal more hopeful with regard to the future as soon as the return journey to England had been accomplished, and he and his wife were installed in the old dower-house which was henceforth to be their home. It was as pretty and charming a residence as any woman of refined tastes could wish for, and Ida expressed her satisfaction

with it in more animated terms than she was accustomed to employ. She had, indeed, inspected the White House carelessly once or twice from the outside, and had admired its overhanging gables, its black beams, its large, old-fashioned garden and its pleasant situation upon the southern slope of a wooded hill; but she had not bargained for Chippendale furniture, Sheraton cabinets and old oak sideboards, and she frankly avowed as much to her husband, who laughed contentedly.

'Oh, all this is my mother's doing,' said he. 'I gave her *carte blanche* to furnish the place for us, and she was only too glad to have the fun of it. She's knowing about these things, which is more than I am. I can't for the life of me see why one shape of chair is better than another, so long as it will bear your weight. I'm glad you're pleased, though.'

She was genuinely pleased, and for some time after she had taken up her abode in the White House she continued to be in comparatively good spirits. She had plenty to occupy her during these first days; she made friends

with fat, good-natured Lady Elizabeth, with whom she had certain tastes in common; she found that she could get on well enough with old Mr. Chaine, alarming though his prolonged periods of silence and abrupt queries touching her religious views were; and, best of all, John was off her hands. John was busy with the steward from morning to night; he mounted his horse immediately after breakfast and was not always able to return in time for luncheon; he explained apologetically that the estate had been more or less neglected for many years and that, if you wanted to get things done, the only way was to see them done yourself.

'John,' observed his father, somewhat fretfully, one day, 'is a new broom—he wants to be making and meddling everywhere. Well, I dare say it is true that I am not as rich a man as I might have been if I had devoted my whole attention to my property; but I venture to think that my life has been more usefully employed. John, of course, has no public duties, and would not care to have any.

John's wife returned silent and devout thanks to Heaven that he was so amply provided with private duties. He could be borne with at dinner-time—during which meal he usually narrated at considerable length the conversations that he had held in the course of the day with this or that unreasonable farmer—and as soon as it was over, his habit was to fall asleep. No doubt he would go on arguing with unreasonable farmers and eating his dinner and falling asleep until the end of the chapter—apparently it was for some such purpose that he had been created.

Meanwhile, Ida's own private duties began to leave her with more spare time upon her hands than was, perhaps, good for her. One cannot be always re-arranging furniture; the servants in a well-ordered household do not require a great deal of looking after; and as for receiving and returning the visits of the neighbours, that was a task which was the more speedily disposed of because it was such a supremely uninteresting one and because Mrs. John Chaine was not the best hand in

the world at disguising her feelings. They called, and did their best to talk, and went away with an angry and uncomfortable impression of having been snubbed — those worthy, dull-witted neighbours of hers. She had really nothing to say to them, so she said nothing, or next to nothing, and a smile of relief came over her face when they rose to depart. It may be urged in extenuation of her foolish behaviour that she was still young, that she was far from being happy and that she did not know how keenly every word and action of hers was watched by people who seemed to be devoid of anything approaching to keenness.

One day, however, a visitor was announced who differed in many essential particulars from the ordinary run of somnolent Southshire squires and squiresses. Ida had heard of Mr. Leonard Fraser as a young man who had recently and somewhat unexpectedly inherited a property in the vicinity, upon the death of a distant relative ; but she had not heard what manner of man he was, for the excellent reason

that nobody had been able to tell her. He had been a tolerably constant absentee since his elevation to a lot of moderate wealth and high respectability; his face was scarcely known in the county, and there was a melancholy rumour abroad to the effect that he was not interested in cultivating either the acres that he owned or the acquaintance of those who dwelt around them. That was a species of indifference which Ida had no difficulty in condoning; and her first glance at Mr. Fraser, as he entered her drawing-room, convinced her that it was only natural on his part. Mr. Fraser was one of those products of modern civilisation who cannot exist with comfort to themselves or others out of large towns. His long, curly hair, which was brushed back behind his ears, his peaked, reddish beard, his pale complexion, his long, white fingers and the studied negligence of his costume proclaimed him at once to be an artist, a musician, or a dilettante; and even in pitch darkness his speech would have bewrayed him.

'I am not at all sure that I ought not to

apologise for calling upon you, Mrs. Chaine,' he began, in the mincing accents affected by the cultured youth of the epoch. 'Am I an older resident than you, or are you an older resident than I? We are both of us so new that the point is rather a nice one, I am afraid. However, if my ignorance of county etiquette has led me into committing a solecism, I must cast myself upon your mercy.'

Ida responded with rather more graciousness than she generally took the trouble to display to her visitors. She had no particular fancy for æsthetic young gentlemen; but anything is welcome by way of a change, and if Mr. Fraser proved to be as tedious in one way as the squires and squiresses were in another, there would be no necessity to do more than leave one of John's cards upon him.

But Mr. Fraser, as it happened, was not at all tedious. His manner was a little affected at first; but the affectation disappeared as soon as he discovered that Mrs. Chaine was, like himself, a lover of music, and upon that subject he talked, not only with evident

knowledge of it, but with the modesty which belongs to genuine knowledge of any subject.

'I am only a third-class performer,' he told her candidly, 'if indeed I may venture to call myself that; but I know pretty well how things ought to be done, because I have had a thorough musical education. In fact, I was preparing to make my living by music when old Mr. Fraser, who was a far-away cousin of mine, died and robbed me of all excuse for attempting to earn a living. Possibly he may have meant to be kind when he nominated me as his heir, though it is more likely that he meant to be unkind to somebody else; but, either way, I can't feel very grateful to him for having thrust a square peg into a round hole. Just imagine an unhappy musical student being all of a sudden transmogrified into a country gentleman and being informed that it is his duty to reside for at least three-fourths of the year in a part of the world where nobody knows a fugue from a polka and where foxes are a good deal more highly thought of than fiddlers!'

'I can quite understand your hating this part of the world,' answered Ida; 'but you don't reside here so very much, by all accounts. The violin is your instrument, then?'

'Well, yes; it is rather more my instrument than the piano or the organ, though I play all three after a fashion. I dare say I might have become a tolerably decent fiddler if the Fates had been propitious; as it is, I only scrape away for about an hour every day, which of course is no good. It is all very well to talk about art for art's sake; but one can't summon up energy to practise when one hasn't a soul to play to or with.'

The hint was obvious, and Ida had no desire to ignore it. She explained that she, too, was a musician in a humble way and that she suffered, as he did, from the lack of any appreciative listener. Would he bring his violin some afternoon and let her try to play his accompaniments for him?

Mr. Fraser jumped at the suggestion. 'I am sure you can't have any idea,' said he, 'of what a boon you are offering me. I don't

really care for anything in the world except music, and I'm afraid I must add that I am almost absolutely ignorant of everything else. If I may sometimes come and play with you, I shall feel that suicide isn't my sole means of forgetting that I am in the ridiculous position of a landed proprietor who mistakes mangold-wurzels for turnips and who couldn't bring down a partridge if his life depended upon it.'

He sat for some little time and narrated his uneventful history quite frankly. His parents, it appeared, had been very poor; he had never for one moment imagined that he himself was likely to come into money; what he had looked forward to had been to obtain a berth as organist of some London church and to eke out his salary by giving lessons. He was not unconscious of the responsibilities which had devolved upon him; he wished to make the best that he could of an impossible situation; but he confessed that he had been greatly irritated and discouraged by the undisguised contempt which his bailiff, his

butler, and his gamekeeper manifested towards him.

'We artists are thin-skinned people,' he said, with a slight return of that fatuous manner which he had doubtless picked up from the associates of his youth; 'we can't help being vexed by pin-pricks and flea-bites. I suppose it is the penalty that we must expect to pay for having rather quicker perceptions than the rest of the world.'

Upon the whole, Ida liked the man and sympathised with his woes; so that she was sorry to hear him spoken of with supreme disdain by her husband, to whom she mentioned the circumstance of his visit later in the evening.

'Oh, yes; I've heard of the fellow,' John said. 'He's no earthly use, they tell me, and hardly what you could call a gentleman either; though I suppose he must have been distantly related to poor old Fraser. Rather cool of him to come and call, I think. Probably he won't trouble you again in that way, though; for I believe he means to let his place.'

Ida shrugged her shoulders and changed the subject. What was the use of telling John that this despised musician was the only individual in the neighbourhood whom she cared to see a second time? He wouldn't have understood what she meant by such a statement.

Yet, if he had been present a few days later, when Mr. Fraser reappeared, bringing his violin with him, he might have understood dimly that a man who can play the fiddle is entitled to that respect which every man who can do an extremely difficult thing may claim. For Mr. Fraser's was no ordinary skill, nor was his mastery over his instrument merely of a technical kind. Severe critics might very likely have condemned his style, as being exaggerated and too emotional; but no such strictures suggested themselves to Ida, who, at the end of his first performance, was ready to fall down and worship him. She had never heard anything like it in her life, she said, and she was ashamed of having marred it by her wretched attempt at an accompaniment.

But he laughed at her enthusiasm (though it evidently pleased him), assuring her that he was nothing but a mediocrity and that she had no reason at all to distrust her capacities as a pianist.

'I can see that you have allowed your playing to become a little rusty,' he remarked; 'but you have been well taught, and I am sure you would improve rapidly if you chose to take the trouble. In fact, you need just what I do—some incentive to devote three or four hours a day to work.'

Well, this was obviously a service which each of them could render to the other, and they gladly agreed to do so. There was no sort of harm in such a compact, which was entered into without *arrière-pensée* on either side; but perhaps they were touching upon somewhat more dangerous ground when they began to speak, as it was almost inevitable they should do, of Mr. John Chaine's unfortunate distaste for music. Ida had too much self-respect to say a word in disparagement of her husband to a stranger; but she could

not help allowing it to be seen that she was out of sympathy with him; and as for Mr. Fraser, his refinement was of a somewhat superficial order. It did not prevent him from openly compassionating his hostess, nor from remarking—

'Well, I must take care never to come here when Mr. Chaine is at home, that's all.'

Now, it was not often that John came home as early as five o'clock in the afternoon; but he chanced to do so upon this occasion, and, to tell the truth, he was anything but civil to the long-haired gentleman whom he found engaged in conversation with his wife.

'How can you stand that offensive brute!' he exclaimed, as soon as poor Fraser had been frightened away. 'He looks like—upon my word, I don't know *what* he looks like! A dancing-master, or something of that sort.'

'My dear John,' answered Ida composedly, 'it no more matters what he looks like than it matters what his fiddle looks like. His playing is simply divine!'

'H'm! that may be,' grunted John. 'He

wasn't playing when I came in, though; he was talking.'

'Yes, he was talking; and he is heartily welcome to talk or do anything else that he can't do particularly well, if only he will sometimes give me the delight of hearing what he *can* do so wonderfully.'

John opened his lips, as if with the intention of making some rejoinder, but thought better of it. Jealous and suspicious by temperament, he was nevertheless just, humble, and very well aware of his own failings. He could not insult his wife by insinuating that the White House might have other attractions for Mr. Fraser than those which a mere accompanist could offer; so he held his peace and confined himself to inwardly cursing that talented gentleman, for whom he at once conceived sentiments not very far removed from hatred.

CHAPTER VIII

FORTUNE FAVOURS THE FIDDLER

THERE are plenty of men and women in the world of whom it may be said that they would have acquitted themselves respectably, and perhaps admirably, but for adverse circumstances. The material is not bad; it only requires moulding; but, since they do not possess sufficient force of character to take the initiative and mould themselves, they usually turn out deplorable failures and end by being at least unsuccessful and unhappy, even if they escape a worse fate. Leonard Fraser was quite as good a fellow as most of us; if he had been taken in hand in boyhood and sent to a public school and to one of the universities, he would doubtless have developed into as satisfactory a country gentleman as he had become a musician; but he was much too

weak, sensitive and self-conscious to remodel himself at his present age (which, to be sure, would have been no light undertaking); so that the beneficence of his deceased relative had simply converted him, as he himself had truly said, into a square peg in a round hole. How infinitely wiser it would have been on the part of that deceased relative to leave him ten thousand pounds down! However, it is probable that the late owner of Hatton Park had thought less about being wise or beneficent than about disappointing certain presumptuous persons who had entertained hopes of succeeding him, and the present owner, after a brief experience of the pleasures of proprietorship, had arrived at the conclusion that the very best thing for him to do would be to let the place and never revisit it.

He was not mistaken: being what he was, that would unquestionably have proved his most sensible course. Yet, as he walked homewards from the White House, carrying his violin, he said to himself that he would think twice or three times more before adopt-

ing it. Like the majority of human beings, he did not enjoy the sensation of being beaten, and he knew that his departure from Hatton Park would be tantamount to an admission of defeat. The neighbours wanted him to go; his own servants wanted him to go; he had been given to understand by a hundred more or less broad hints that he was not the man for the place; and he could not much longer have sustained, single-handed, a daily struggle against this hostile coalition, unless he had had something to put a little heart into him. For his weal or for his woe, Mrs. John Chaine had supplied what was wanting. In Mrs. Chaine he had found one who not only cared for music, but was capable of distinguishing good music from bad, a sort of *Davidsbündlerin* amongst all these terrible Philistines, a congenial spirit whose sympathy might perhaps ripen into friendship some day, and whose society might very well enable him to forget for a few hours at a time the continual and ruthless wounds which were inflicted upon his pride. He thought that, for

her sake, he would at any rate linger awhile in that great dreary mansion of his, and it may be added that he was in no way influenced by the fact that Mrs. Chaine was young and handsome, as well as musically gifted.

The great, dreary mansion looked a trifle less hateful to him than usual when he came in sight of it, though it had little to commend it to anybody's admiration. Built in the early part of the present century, Hatton Park, with its yellowish, stuccoed façade, its Greek portico and its half-dozen gigantic pillars, flanked right and left by the smaller colonnades which fronted the side-wings, was one of those English country houses which nothing can redeem from forbidding ugliness. Just now it presented, in addition, that forlorn aspect which is common to all uninhabited houses; for it could scarcely be said to be inhabited by the gentleman with the violin who was scrutinising it wistfully.

'Of course,' he muttered, 'a wife and children would make a difference; but, good gracious me! where am I to find a wife who

would match the furniture? One's former class would be quite inadmissible, and one's present class would probably turn up its nose at the suggestion. Or perhaps, if it didn't, I might take the liberty of turning up mine. No; so long as I remain in this prison, I shall have to resign myself to a sentence of solitary confinement.'

But the prison, as has been mentioned, did not frown upon him this evening with its wonted severity, and he was less annoyed than usual when, on entering it, he was met by the butler with an announcement, the terms of which were disagreeably familiar to him: 'Mr. Barton would be glad to speak to you for a minute, sir, if you was disengaged.'

'Very well; tell him to come into the study,' he answered, with a sigh.

Barton was the gamekeeper, and was of his dependents the one whom Leonard Fraser disliked the most. Under the late régime Barton had apparently been a privileged person: at all events, he gave himself the airs of one, and, although he was fond of asking for

orders, he never dreamt of acting upon them unless they happened to accord with his own ideas of what ought to be done. His scorn for a master who was no sportsman was unbounded and unconcealed. He came in presently, a stalwart, swarthy fellow of middle age, in a brown velveteen coat and leather gaiters.

'About them young birds, sir,' he began.

'I have told you over and over again,' interrupted Leonard fretfully, 'that I know no more than I care about young birds. All I ask of you is to do your duty, which you understand better than I do, and to refrain from bothering me.'

Barton smiled grimly.

'Very good, sir,' he replied; 'there's always been a good head of game here, and I hope 'twill always be so. But 'tain't easy for a keeper to give satisfaction to a gentleman who don't take no interest in shooting.'

'Nothing is easier than to give satisfaction to me,' Leonard declared. 'I myself don't shoot, as you know; but I suppose I shall have to ask other people to shoot in the

autumn, and I wish you to give satisfaction to them. That is all I have to say about it.'

Barton, however, had a good deal more to say. What he said was, for the most part, unintelligible to Leonard, and he evidently took a covert delight in making it so; but when he arrived at the point of inquiring in aggressive accents whether it was a fact that he was suspected of vulpicide, his harassed master suddenly turned upon him.

'Well, since you ask me,' he replied, 'it is a fact that you have been so accused. I had several letters of complaint upon the subject last winter, while I was away. Of course I wasn't in a position to judge whether they were justified or not. I could only reply that no foxes had been killed, or would be killed, by my orders.'

'There never was no complaints in the old squire's time,' said Barton sullenly; 'nor yet he wouldn't have listened to none. The old squire, he were a gentleman.'

'I am obliged to you for the complimentary inference,' returned Leonard, who

was growing angry; 'but I will thank you to confine your observations in future to matters connected with the duties that you are paid for performing. You may take it that one of these will be to keep me out of trouble with the foxhunters, and if the coverts are drawn blank next season I shall know whom to blame. Good evening.'

'There's two litters o' cubs in the woods as I might bring up by 'and, if you wished it, sir,' answered the man sarcastically; 'or may be you'd like to turn a few foxes down. There's no accounting for tastes, and you having, as one may say, *no* tastes at all——'

'I should like you to do exactly what you did in the late Mr. Fraser's lifetime,' interrupted Leonard, with an outburst of irascibility. 'I should like you to do your work without talking so much about it; and, in addition to that, I should like you to leave the room. I hope that is sufficiently explicit.'

Barton smiled compassionately and retired, having, no doubt, accomplished the object of his intrusion. He had been given a free

hand and could afford to overlook the petulance of an employer whom he so thoroughly despised. Perhaps also the despised employer, who, after all, had power to discharge him at any moment, might have afforded to overlook his insolence; but it was Leonard Fraser's misfortune that he was unable to take a philosophic view of such petty vexations. He fretted and worried himself for a long time after Barton's departure, and it was not until he had had his dinner and had settled down to a good three hours of violin practice that he could dismiss from his mind the painful memory of having been called no gentleman by one of his subordinates.

But better times were in store for one upon whom the favours of Fortune had been so ironically bestowed. The daily miseries attendant upon the absurd situation in which he was placed did not cease; but for some weeks after his first visit to Ida Chaine he had daily consolations which went far towards atoning for them. Every afternoon he betook himself to the White House with his violin

and every afternoon he was enabled, for at least two hours, to forget everything in the world except music. A true artist cannot, after all, be always unhappy, though it is probable that the true artistic temperament is incompatible with anything like a quiet, steady enjoyment of life. Leonard Fraser was enough of an artist to throw all his faculties into his work while it lasted; but work is naturally followed by a brief spell of relaxation and some exchange of ideas with fellow-workers; so that it did not take long for the fiddler and his accompanist to become intimate friends. There never was the slightest thought or suggestion of anything beyond friendship between them; but each (as indeed was but reasonable) felt sincerely sorry for the other.

Ida, for her part, felt at this time sincerely sorry for herself; nor did it comfort her much to remember that her lot was of her own choosing. She would not—so she thought—have chosen it, had she known what it was going to be; she would not have

bound herself for life to a man who took no trouble at all to make life pleasant to her, who seemed to be of opinion that keeping house and returning visits were occupations sufficient to satisfy a rational human being and who had fits of taciturn sulkiness for which no ostensible cause could be assigned. John, in short, was proving himself to be what all lovers are—a good deal less submissive after than before marriage. He, too, had his grievance; he, too, was conscious of neglect and ill-usage. If his wife had deigned to question him, he would have been only too thankful to tell her why he was so often troubled and depressed; it would have been a relief to him to confide to her how continually he was thwarted and humiliated by his father, who, while nominally entrusting him with the management of the estate, interfered with him and countermanded his orders at every turn. But since Ida did not seem to take the faintest interest in what interested him, he held his tongue and was, it must be confessed, to all intents and pur-

purposes a sulky companion. To understand is to forgive, says the French proverb; but it is just because one-half of our race cannot by any possibility understand the other half that the world is out of joint.

It may be, however, that John hardly did justice to his own limited powers of comprehension when he professed himself unable to understand why his wife should wish to ask Mr. Fraser to dinner.

He himself had suggested that they should give a dinner-party in acknowledgment of the civilities that had been shown to them, and he had no objection to make to the list of guests submitted to him until he came to Fraser's name.

'Really,' he exclaimed, 'I think you might be satisfied to have that fellow here six days out of the week, making his horrid cater-wauling noises; there can't be any necessity for inflicting him upon our friends. It is nonsense to say that you want a bachelor to fill up the number; St. Albyn's is full of unmarried soldiers.'

Nevertheless, the producer of the horrid, caterwauling noises duly received his invitation. Ida did not make a point of sending it; she merely declined discussion and requested orders—which is as good a method as another of obtaining your own way—and as Leonard did not know that he was forcing his company upon an unwilling host, he arrived on the appointed evening, bringing his fiddle with him. He did not enjoy the banquet; but then he had not expected to do so. He had come simply because Ida had asked him and because it would have been quite absurd to plead a previous engagement; he had been prepared to be cold-shouldered by old Mr. Chaine and Lady Elizabeth and the other county notables whom he found assembled in the drawing-room, and his anticipations were fully verified.

But what he had not been at all prepared for was the brilliant success which he achieved after dinner, when, at his hostess's request, he produced his beloved instrument. It was not that a single person who listened to him,

except perhaps Lady Elizabeth, could detect any appreciable difference between his performance and that of an Italian organ-grinder; but the exception was, socially speaking, an important one, for in Lady Elizabeth Chaine Southshire had long recognised its appointed leader and guide. Now Lady Elizabeth was so far a woman of fashion that she had a hankering after people who were out of the common and did not in the least care what their parentage might be so long as they possessed some amusing or interesting capacities. Consequently she trotted across the room to Mr. Fraser, while he was putting the violin back into its case, and favoured him with some handsome compliments which were audible to everybody.

'I had no idea that you could play like that,' she said quite frankly. 'Of course one had heard something about your having had a musical education; but that, as you know, may mean a great deal or very little. In your case, it has evidently meant a great deal. To think that we should have been entertain-

ing an angel unawares all this time!—or at least omitting to entertain him. Unfortunately, Mr. Chaine is so often unwell now that we cannot give large parties; but we occasionally have a few friends to dinner, and it would be a great kindness if you would join us some evening and let us have such another treat as we have had to-night. With talents like yours it really isn't permissible to be a hermit.'

That was quite enough for the other ladies, who had hitherto been at some pains to show how completely Mr. Fraser was beneath their notice. With one consent they rose from their chairs, formed square round him and saluted him with a volley of invitations. They were all of them, it appeared, immense admirers of music; they all said pretty much what Lady Elizabeth had said; they all asked him to dinner and all expressed their regret that they had been kept so long in ignorance of their neighbour's genius. Probably it did not occur to one of them that such expressions of regret were scarcely flattering to their neigh-

bour, who might have preferred recognition based upon other grounds. However, he was not offended, nor even amused; he received their advances very good-humouredly, although it must be acknowledged that, upon the strength of his sudden popularity, he gave himself a few airs, doubting whether he could promise to be disengaged at any given date and mentioning that he did not always feel in the mood for playing. Thereby he naturally enhanced his value in the esteem of his suppliants, whose cordiality redoubled and who remained grouped around him while he folded his arms and leant back against the piano, sunning himself in their smiles.

At this little scene John Chaine, standing apart, looked on with lowered brows. He was not a very acute observer; but he was acute enough to divine that the whole thing was the result of a cunningly devised stratagem on Ida's part. She had taken a fancy to the long-haired violinist; she had determined to secure for him a position in the county which

he never could have gained without her help; she had taken the measure of her mother-in-law's foolish good nature and she had triumphed over such difficulties as had lain in her path. That, of course, was all very well; a fancy for long-haired violinists is not forbidden to persons of musical tastes; still he had an uncomfortable feeling of having been outwitted, and Mr. Fraser's obvious self-satisfaction was extremely irritating to him. Consequently, when the party had broken up, he was so foolish as to remark to his wife:

'Well, I hope you are satisfied. I doubt whether your protégé will do you much credit; but, such as he is, you have made yourself responsible for him.'

'I am perfectly willing to accept the responsibility,' answered Ida coldly. 'No one, except you, would think of describing Mr. Fraser as my protégé; but if he were my protégé, I should be very proud of him.'

John, being a poor hand at repartee, only

grunted and strode out of the room. He was not exactly jealous of Fraser yet; but he was going to be jealous, and the worst of it was that his jealousy could so easily be made to appear ridiculous.

CHAPTER IX

THE DUTIFUL SON

To many men it makes all the difference in the world whether the rooms in which they have to spend the greater part of their lives are furnished in good or bad taste, and some of us are able to sympathise with those apparently ridiculous persons who would rather eat a bad dinner prettily served than a good one marred by repulsive surroundings. Now, Wilfrid Chaine, who yielded to no one in his appreciation of personal comfort, was so full of common sense and so far removed from being ridiculous that mere beauty had scarcely any intrinsic attractions for him. The rooms which he occupied in St. James's Street being commodious as well as conveniently situated, it had not occurred to him to waste money upon adorning them with nicknacks ; they contained

a sufficiency of chairs which were easy, notwithstanding their ugliness; and as he never by any chance dined at home, he had no reason to complain of the landlord's wife, whose culinary skill was equal to providing him with a satisfactory breakfast.

On a certain morning in the height of the London season he was partaking of that meal in a spirit of happy serenity, because the letters which he had found awaiting him on the table had proved to be unusually agreeable reading. One of these, indeed, contained an invitation to dinner from no less a personage than the wife of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, while two others requested the pleasure of his company at quasi-political entertainments to which a young man who had no political connections or aspirations would hardly have been asked. But, pleasant though these missives were (for it was Wilfrid's ambition to become a member of Parliament and distinguish himself in that capacity), they did not gratify him quite so much as a lengthy epistle from his mother, at which he glanced

from time to time, with a smile, while he sipped his coffee.

'I wish you could manage to throw over your engagements and come home, even if it were only for a week,' Lady Elizabeth wrote; 'your father seems to miss you more and more, and he can't hit things off with John at all. They don't exactly quarrel; but there are daily disputes about trifles and I must say that John is very pig-headed and provoking. He doesn't understand how to manage your father and he won't try. For the matter of that, he doesn't understand how to manage anybody—least of all his wife, who is really not a bad sort of woman, though I doubt whether she is blessed with the patience that all wives require. At present he has taken it into his head to be furiously jealous of her because she amuses herself by playing duets with that rather absurd-looking Fraser individual, who, as I dare say you may remember, came into the Hatton Park estate so unexpectedly. The man is an admirable violinist and I don't at all wonder that Ida should have taken

him up—in fact, I think of taking him up myself—but nobody except John would dream of looking upon him as anything more than a violinist. However, John chooses to suspect him, and of course he doesn't draw a decent veil over his suspicions, and I suppose there will be a domestic battle-royal over it sooner or later. You may imagine how this sort of thing annoys your father, who has got wind of it and takes it quite seriously ; you know what his view would be—gross and inexcusable insult to a lady of unblemished character, and so forth—I assure you it is as much as I can do to restrain him from precipitating matters by rebuking John severely and openly. All this is most disagreeable and keeps your father in a state of constant irritability, which is the worst thing in the world for his health. I can't help thinking that, if you were here, you would be able to smooth him down, as only you can. Of course it would be dull for you ; but after all, isn't it sometimes worth while to submit to a little dulness ?'

Wilfrid was amused by his mother's in-

genuous suggestion, the true meaning of which was perfectly clear to him. It would, no doubt, be well worth his while to submit to the dulness of a brief residence at Chaine Court if, by so doing, he could secure for himself the prospect of ultimately residing there as owner of the surrounding lands; but he was by no means sure that it would be wise to interfere with those who were so obligingly playing his game for him.

'All that poor, stupid old John wants,' he reflected, 'is plenty of rope. Let him only go on as he is doing for another month or so, and he will hang himself as effectually as I could ever hope to hang him. As if it wasn't enough to begin driving before the reins are in his hand, he must needs scandalise a justly-provoked parent by falling out with his wife! Really I don't know what more he could achieve in the way of clumsiness, unless it were to proclaim himself a ritualist or a free-thinker. My poor, dear John, I can't do better than leave you alone and attend to my own business.'

This was an eminently satisfactory conclu-

sion to arrive at; but what was not quite so satisfactory was to be informed, a few minutes later, by his servant that a lady who declined to give her name had called to see him and insisted upon admittance. He knew at once who the lady must be, and very angry he was with her for having thus disregarded his explicit commands; still he knew better than to gratify the man's curiosity by showing any vexation.

'A lady?' he repeated, with an appropriate air of surprise. 'Ask her to come in, then, of course. What were you thinking of to keep her standing outside?'

And when the tall, handsome woman, dressed in widow's weeds, was ushered into his presence, he started up promptly, shaking her by the hand and exclaiming:

'Oh, Mrs. Viccars, I was wondering whether it could be you! I am so sorry that you weren't let in without parley; but, as you may suppose, my bachelor's quarters are not often honoured by lady visitors, and we thought there might be some mistake.'

Mrs. Viccars did not reply until the door had been closed. Then she said, in a determined voice:

'I don't know whether my coming here has been a mistake or not, Wilfrid; but I shall know before I go away. One thing I can tell you; and that is, you have made a very great mistake in not coming to see me all this time.'

'So it would appear, since this is your way of taking reprisals. I needn't tell you, because you are perfectly well aware of it, that at this season of the year I am full of engagements which I can't possibly neglect without running the risk of being forgotten and of compromising my whole future career. I presume, too, that you must be pretty well aware of the risk that both you and I are running at the present moment.'

'Quite aware of it,' returned Mrs. Viccars; 'the only thing is that I might have run a still greater risk by remaining away and allowing you to drop me—which is what you want to do. You could have come to Wel-

lington Terrace if you had chosen; anyhow, there was nothing to prevent your writing to me. Now, Wilfrid, you had better understand, once for all, that I am not the woman to be treated as you propose to treat me. It is true that I can't force you to marry me. You have it in your power to behave like a villain and even to deprive me of my daily bread; but I have it in my power to ruin you, remember. It would be easy enough for me to go down to Chaine Court to-morrow and say half a dozen words to the Squire.'

That was the unfortunate part of it. Wilfrid neither meant to marry this woman nor to deprive her of her daily bread; but owing to his peculiar circumstances, she certainly had it in her power to dictate terms to him. This he felt to be very hard. In the whole course of his life he had only been guilty of one act of signal folly, and now it looked as if his punishment might be made altogether disproportionate to his offence. However, the occasion was not one for the display of weakness; so he answered:

'You do wrong to threaten me, Jessie; I don't like being threatened, and what you say confirms my suspicion that you care a good deal less for me individually than you do for the social position that you would acquire as my wife. Well, you may be sure that you won't acquire that social position, such as it is, by ruining me. By all means go and denounce me to my father, if you choose; he probably won't believe your story; still you might try. Only, if you do, you will relieve me of any sort of obligation that I may owe to you, and I will never speak to you again as long as I live. You must decide whether it is to be peace or war between us.'

'You would not speak like that if you still loved me!' exclaimed Mrs. Viccars in a trembling voice.

'Would you threaten to ruin me if you still loved me?'

'Yes — perhaps. Don't you understand that it is possible to love and hate a person at the same time? I often feel as if I hated you, Wilfrid. I believe you are a bad man;

I believe you don't care for anybody in the world except yourself; I know that your one wish just now is to supplant Mr. John, and I am almost sure that, if you weren't afraid of the Squire, you would break all your promises to me. And yet it isn't for the sake of what you call social position that I am determined to make you keep them.'

Wilfrid shrugged his shoulders.

'I also am a rather determined sort of person,' he remarked.

'That means that you are determined to abandon me. Very well, then I shall know what to do.'

'My good Jessie, if you will listen to sensible advice, you will hold your peace and bide your time. Nevertheless, if you think that you can afford to defy me, try it, and we will see which of us is the stronger. I merely wish to warn you once more that I am not to be defied with impunity and that your speaking about me to my father will mean an absolute and final rupture of our present relations.'

The dispute ended as disputes always do end when neither combatant is thoroughly in earnest and when each is afraid of the other. As far as words went, Wilfrid had perhaps the best of it, because he kept his head cool; but the woman, being unquestionably in the right, was able to hold her ground, and when she left him he had extorted nothing more than a respite from her. She still hoped against hope that he would eventually consent to marry her; she was reluctant to take any step that might deprive her of that poor chance; and yet she was sore enough and angry enough to act desperately upon the impulse of the moment and destroy her future for the sake of revenge.

Wilfrid, on his side, hoped to hold her at bay until after his father's death. It was by no means unlikely that he might succeed in so doing; but then again it was by no means unlikely that he might fail. Obviously, all must depend upon the duration of his father's life.

'Remember, Jessie,' were his last words

to her, after she had, as usual, given way to an outburst of hysterical weeping—'remember that I have never given you any reason to be jealous and that I have given you very good reasons for waiting and possessing your soul in patience. Some day you may perhaps admit that if I had married you now I should have been a downright lunatic.'

Well, he had got rid of her for a time, and he had managed to frighten her, and he had not let her see how much she had frightened him. That, after all, he reflected, was about as much as he could have expected to achieve with the limited means at his disposal. Still, when he was once more alone, he was not happy nor at ease in his mind. He doubted whether he had not been somewhat injudiciously peremptory; he foresaw that a repetition of this scene was in store for him at no very distant date, and one outcome of his cogitations was that he decided to reply to his mother in a different sense from that which he had originally contemplated. It seemed best to get away from

London: possibly also he might establish some claim upon his father's gratitude by sacrificing the fascinations of town life in order to console a distressed country gentleman whose eldest son was no sort of consolation to him.

Accordingly, Lady Elizabeth was made happy on the following morning by the announcement that Wilfrid was ready to incur the above sacrifice; while Jessie Viccars, to her great joy, received a note from the man whom she loved which was worded in more affectionate terms than she had dared to hope for. In it Wilfrid explained that he had been summoned home, owing to his father's precarious state of health, and added that his prospects and hers might probably be brighter before the summer was over. He likewise dwelt upon the necessity for patience and the extreme danger of any indiscretion on her part. Finally, he assured her that the recollection of their quarrel had distressed him greatly and that he trusted it would be their last. He feared that he had spoken

with too much harshness; but he thought she would feel that her accusations and menaces had been of a kind to which no man could submit meekly.

That, Wilfrid flattered himself, was not so badly put; for indeed he had but a poor opinion of Jessie's intelligence. He dismissed her from his mind when he left London, after writing to excuse himself from his various engagements, and devoted his own intelligence (of which he had a deservedly high opinion) to the consideration of how he might best widen the breach between his father and his elder brother, while remaining upon terms of amity with both of them.

As a matter of fact, no great skill was required to elucidate that problem; for, on reaching home, he found the state of affairs to be all that he could have wished it to be. His parents welcomed him with warmth and gratitude, and in the course of the evening Mr. Chaine took occasion to mention how highly and how justly he was incensed against John.

'I have never,' the old gentleman declared, 'expected pleasant or gracious behaviour from John; to some people pleasantness and graciousness are, no doubt, unattainable virtues. But I wish him to understand—and it will be my duty to make him understand—that so long as I live orders must be issued by me, not by him.'

'That is of course,' observed Wilfrid.

'Well, I confess that I should have thought so; but apparently he does not think so. I am far from claiming infallibility for myself; I only claim to be master of my own property, and it seems to me that if I were prepared to delegate all authority and responsibility to my substitute, I might as well hand the place over to him at once and retire to the White House for the remainder of my days. I am not prepared to do that; I am not even prepared to say for certain that John shall succeed me at my death. In my opinion, he is not showing himself worthy in any way of the position that would thus devolve upon him. Not in any way.'

'John is rough,' remarked Wilfrid pensively, 'and I dare say he is apt to be a little too blunt in his way of stating his views; but after all, he is a good-hearted fellow.'

'It is charitable of you to say so; but you are hardly as well acquainted with your brother as I am. I am not, I believe, prone to injustice, nor do I ever forget that we must forgive the trespasses of others, as we hope that our own may be forgiven; still a distinction must be drawn between the sinner and the sin, and when I remember that it has pleased God to place the destinies of a number of my humbler fellow-creatures in my hands, I feel bound to ask myself whether I ought to commit them to a man of John's peculiar and capricious disposition. You have probably heard from your mother that we have been very much vexed of late by the attitude which he has seen fit to take up with regard to his wife.'

Wilfrid admitted that he had been told something about it; but opined that it was

always unwise to interfere in such cases. John would doubtless realise before long what a fool he was making of himself.

'I have not interfered, and I am not going to interfere,' returned Mr. Chaine rather snappishly. 'I draw my own conclusions from such a manifestation of folly—to call it by no worse name—that is all. That your brother will ever recognise himself to be a fool is, I own, a contingency which does not strike me as worth taking into account.'

In truth old Mr. Chaine could not pardon his eldest son for being a fool and could not believe him to be anything else. Little as he supposed it, that was, in his estimation, John's cardinal offence, and perhaps his preference for Wilfrid was chiefly due to his conviction of the latter's remarkable intellectual gifts. In any case, he did greatly prefer Wilfrid, and, being out of health, out of spirits and out of temper, he scarcely affected any longer to conceal what had always been a more or less open secret.

In former years, when he had had plenty

of business to transact and a voluminous correspondence to attend to, it had been his custom to shut himself up in his study for two or three hours every morning; but now that he had retired from public life, his time hung somewhat heavily upon his hands, so that he was gratified by Wilfrid's suggestion, after breakfast on the ensuing day, that they should stroll down as far as the home farm together.

'I should like it, if it will not weary you and if you won't mind walking slowly,' he said, with that pathetic deference of old age which was all the more touching in one who had never been wont to behave deferentially either to his juniors or his seniors.

Wilfrid, without being in the least touched, was sincerely desirous of giving his father pleasure; so they set forth, and, as chance would have it, they were still some little distance from their destination when they encountered John, who, mounted upon his stout cob, was going his daily rounds. The meeting between the two brothers was cordial;

that between the father and son was a good deal less so.

'I was hoping to see you to-day, sir,' John said, after a few commonplaces had been interchanged; 'I want to know what is to be done about Skinner. His lease is nearly out, and I don't think it ought to be renewed. We should do better to take the farm into our own hands than to keep such a worthless tenant.'

Mr. Chaine drew his shaggy brows together.

'I thought I had already told you what my wishes are upon that subject,' he answered. 'Skinner has been unfortunate latterly; but I don't choose to turn my tenants adrift simply because they have been unfortunate. And I believe Skinner to be a God-fearing man.'

'Oh, I dare say he may be,' returned John impatiently; 'he is a most confoundedly bad farmer, though, and he is a long way in arrear with his rent.'

'That is my affair,' said Mr. Chaine.

'Quite so; only, as I am managing the estate for you and doing my best to get things into working order, I am bound to tell you the truth about your tenants. Of course I can't compel you to believe facts or to act upon them—I wish to Heaven I could!'

It must be admitted that John's manner was the reverse of conciliatory; but what he said was prompted by motives of perfect honesty and disinterestedness, though his father gave him no credit for anything of the kind.

'When you have an estate of your own, if you ever do have one,' began the old man angrily, 'you will be free to regard it as a mere source of revenue and to manage it accordingly. Those are not my views, and while I live, my views will be carried out here, if you please.'

A heated altercation followed, to which Wilfrid listened in demure silence, foreseeing that he would presently be appealed to. And when his anticipation was fulfilled he

proved himself quite deserving of the confidence reposed in him as an impartial arbitrator.

'I'm afraid John is right, sir,' said he, shaking his head; 'that fellow Skinner is no good, and never will be. Still one does feel reluctant to kick an old tenant out when he is past work.'

'There is no question of his being kicked out,' rejoined Mr. Chaine sharply. 'I have said distinctly—only your brother does not seem able to take in the meaning of distinct language—that I will not have Skinner disturbed.'

'As you please,' said John, gathering up his reins. 'You lose a good deal of money, and you establish a very bad precedent, that's all.'

Mr. Chaine was preparing to make a wrathful retort; but Wilfrid interposed good-humouredly with—

'That's quite true, John, and you've relieved your conscience by saying so. You should allow a small margin for human

weakness and charity, though. When all's said and done, we aren't a speculating land company, and I suppose neither my father nor you would care to earn the reputation of extorting rack-rents.'

John grunted and rode away, while old Mr. Chaine remarked, with a sigh:

'You don't quite see the point, Wilfrid. Of course Skinner is not a satisfactory tenant, and if that had been all that your brother meant to say, I should have had no complaint to make. But his real object is to convince me that I don't know how to manage my own affairs. Now, I have the presumption to think that, after half a century's experience, I know a little more about it than he does; added to which, I have no inclination to abdicate while I still retain possession of my faculties. John is playing a dangerous game —a very dangerous game. It is possible that he may be master here within a very few months, and I suppose that it is what he expects; but it is also possible that he may be disappointed. I am not dead yet, nor

have I yet determined that he shall succeed me when I die.'

This was pleasant hearing for Wilfrid, who hastened to declare that he was sure John meant well.

'I am not able to share that conviction of yours,' responded Mr. Chaine grimly; 'but, even supposing it to be correct, I must remind you that a certain place is said to be paved with good intentions.'

CHAPTER X

MRS. JENKINSON AT HOME

During the summer season garden-parties were events of almost daily occurrence in St. Albyn's. For one thing, all the cathedral dignitaries had good-sized gardens attached to their residences, and for another, the giving of a garden-party is a convenient as well as an inexpensive method of showing hospitality. There are, of course, so many people with whom one is upon visiting terms, but whom one does not exactly care to ask to dinner—officers' wives, for instance, and persons of that kind. Why the wife of an officer in a cavalry regiment should rank so far below the wife of a canon in the scale of precedence may seem somewhat incomprehensible to outsiders; but the fact is beyond dispute, as anybody may satisfy himself who cares to

visit a cathedral city which is also the centre of a military district. In St. Albyn's the Church patronised the army, which submitted to being patronised as meekly as the Church, in its turn, submitted to the patronage of the county. The county as a rule did not grace those frequent entertainments at which Canon Tyler and his reverend playfellows were wont to lose their tempers over a game of croquet; the county, conscious of what was due to itself, was willing to recognise the Dean, but was not quite so sure about the Chapter.

However, an exception was always allowed in the case of Bishop Jenkinson, who was one of the archdeacons of the diocese and who had hastened to resign his episcopal duties in the South Sea Islands on being offered that appointment. Bishop Jenkinson was in some respects a greater personage even than the Dean; for he was very much better off, and, in addition to his lawn sleeves, he possessed a house in London and a wife who was the daughter of an Irish viscount. Consequently, the annual Jenkinson garden-party was,

mutatis mutandis, a function quite as important as the Marlborough House garden-party, and there was never any fear of its being insufficiently attended. In the summer with which this narrative is concerned Mrs. Jenkinson counted upon a rather more brilliant success than usual, because Lady Elizabeth Chaine had not only accepted her invitation but had requested permission to bring her niece Lady Hartlepool with her. Now, Lady Hartlepool, who was upon familiar terms with royalty, occupied a position so near the summit of the social tree that every Canon's wife in St. Albyn's would have knelt down before her without any painful sense of lowered dignity, and it need scarcely be added that as soon as they heard whom they were to have the privilege of meeting, they were, one and all, very determined to be introduced to her. Mrs. Stanton would have liked as well as anybody to be so honoured; but she knew that there was no probability of such luck being in store for her.

'When your dear father was alive,' she said,

in her accustomed complaining voice, to her daughter, as they approached the scene of festivity, 'I felt that I had a right to welcome distinguished strangers, and indeed they never failed to ask that I might be presented to them; but of course we are very differently situated now. That Jenkinson woman, who always turns up her snub nose at me, is much mistaken if she imagines—as no doubt she does—that I shall join Mrs. Pickersgill and the rest of them in pestering her for an introduction to Lady Hartlepool. Since we can't afford to entertain, we must make up our minds to remain in the background, though I do think that this modern fashion of appraising people simply and solely by the amount of their incomes is snobbish and vulgar in the extreme.'

'I think it is rather sensible,' Violet returned. 'People who have so many thousands a year possess a certain definite value as members of the community which atones for their so seldom possessing any intrinsic value. I dare say even Lady Hartlepool wouldn't be

worth much if she were not so rich, and I really don't see what she is likely to be worth to the Pickersgills, as it is. They are heartily welcome to all my share of her notice.'

But Violet, as it happened, was destined to receive the boon by which she set so little store; for very soon after she and her mother had joined the throng she was accosted by Lady Elizabeth Chaine, who beckoned to her and said:

'How do you do, my dear? Come and sit down beside me, if you don't want to get yourself into an unbecoming state of heat by playing lawn-tennis. Mrs. Jenkinson, will you kindly tell somebody to bring a chair for Miss Stanton?'

The truth was that Lady Elizabeth liked pretty things and pretty people. She had met Violet Stanton often enough; but, being somewhat short-sighted, she had not noticed her prettiness and would probably have remained in ignorance thereof to the end of her days, had not her interest been aroused by the enthusiastic description of the girl which she

had heard from her son Hubert. This she went near to avowing in so many words when the astonished Mrs. Jenkinson had sent for a chair and when Violet, who was likewise slightly astonished, had taken possession of it.

'Hubert told me about his meeting you out riding and how splendidly you managed an unmanageable horse,' she went on. 'He has fallen desperately in love with you, you know, and I'm sure I don't wonder at it. Luckily, he has now rejoined his regiment, so that we need not distress ourselves on his account.'

This was said so naturally and unconcernedly that Violet could not feel either embarrassed or offended. Honesty, however, compelled her to observe that it was not she who had exhibited splendid horsemanship upon the occasion alluded to.

'That wretched animal had really beaten me, though I hadn't quite got so far as to acknowledge it when Mr. Chaine appeared. He only just arrived in time to save me from a disgraceful surrender.'

'Well,' answered Lady Elizabeth, laughing,

'I believe Hubert *can* ride. We may concede him that talent, because it is about the only one that he can boast of, poor boy!'

'But that is a very great thing to be able to do,' Violet declared with conviction.

Lady Elizabeth laughed again.

'It is a thing that all sorts of people can do,' said she. 'When you are a little older you won't think so much of it, because then you will have found out what far more difficult feats you yourself can perform. I suppose you haven't been out long, have you?'

'Really I can't quite say,' replied Violet. 'I have been going to balls for the last year, and I go to dinner-parties too, when I am asked—which isn't often. At St. Albyn's one comes out in a very quiet, unobtrusive sort of way; one doesn't go up to London to be presented or anything of that kind.'

'Oh, but you ought to be presented,' Lady Elizabeth returned; 'everybody is presented nowadays. You should make your mother take you up to town for at least one season.'

'That would be very nice; but I might as

well ask to be taken to the antipodes. We couldn't possibly afford a season in London, and even if we could, it would be hardly worth while to go there, for we have no grand relations or acquaintances.'

'I see,' remarked Lady Elizabeth meditatively. She had taken a fancy to the girl, who seemed to be lamentably thrown away amid her present surroundings, and she was so genuinely kind-hearted that she always took pleasure in providing young people with the amusements which she conceived to be their due.

'I wish we were going to be in London this year,' she resumed, after a pause. 'Unfortunately, there can be no question of that while Mr. Chaine continues so unwell; otherwise I should have enjoyed having you to stay with us and taking you about a little. Not that we are grand people, only of course we know a good many people who are. There is my niece, Anne Hartlepool, for instance, who is grand enough for anything and who has no daughters of her own; I am sure she would

have been glad to do all she could for you. Anne, I want to introduce you to Miss Stanton. Miss Stanton is one of our county beauties, who is in danger of being left to blush unseen because her mother won't face the nuisance of a presentation and a London season. I was just saying that it would be a positive kindness to you to let you take such a promising débutante under your wing.'

The tall, somewhat masculine-looking woman in the plain, tailor-made gown who was seated on Lady Elizabeth's left hand appeared a little startled, as well she might be. She returned Violet's bow, smiled and observed:

'There will be no more drawing-rooms this year, you know, Aunt Elizabeth.'

'Of course not, but it might be managed next year. I shall have to go to one myself then, if your uncle is better, and in that case I could undertake the presentation part of the business. Anyhow, I shall count upon you to exert yourself on our behalf when the time comes.'

'I shall be delighted,' answered Lady

Hartlepool, with evident relief. She was aware that her aunt's schemes and fancies were apt to be short-lived, and she probably did not very much care to be saddled with a young woman of whom she had never heard before.

'Oh, you needn't feel alarmed,' said that terribly outspoken Lady Elizabeth; 'Miss Stanton is all right. And you are sure to like her, because she rides like an Amazon. Here comes John, looking a good deal more like a martyr than a saint. What has he done with his wife, I wonder? I must try and find her, because I want her to come and dine while you are here and bring her fiddler with her. He is worth hearing, that fiddler, I can tell you.'

So Lady Elizabeth trotted off, while Violet was left to talk to Lady Hartlepool, with whom she soon made friends, notwithstanding the somewhat trying fashion after which their acquaintanceship had been initiated. Lady Hartlepool, gaunt, rather plain-featured and approaching middle age, was a great lady chiefly because her husband had vast estates

and coal-mines in the north of England. From her youth up it had been one of her principal duties in life to entertain upon a large scale, and this had now become a second nature to her; so that she did not particularly mind it, although she did not particularly like it. Her personal tastes were essentially rustic and sporting, and she was never so happy as during the first two months of the year, when Lord Hartlepool was wont to take a house at Melton and when she hunted regularly six days a week. As she speedily recognised a kindred spirit in Violet Stanton, the conversation which ensued was pleasant to both of them, and not another word was said in the course of it about London or about drawing-rooms. Thus it will be seen that Violet, in spite of the worldliness of which Hubert Chaine and others had accused her, did not know how to make use of her opportunities; and every good mother will sympathise with Mrs. Stanton, who, watching her daughter's triumph from afar, was consoling herself for her own exclusion from high society by

building the most magnificent castles in the air.

Meanwhile, Lady Elizabeth had discovered her daughter-in-law and had acquitted herself of her errand.

'We must ask one or two people to dinner while Anne is with us, and perhaps it wouldn't be quite so deadly dull as usual if you and Mr. Fraser would come and play to us. John needn't accompany you unless he likes. Will you tell him—Mr. Fraser, I mean—when you see him? Why isn't he here this afternoon?'

That was just what Ida wanted to know. He had mentioned that he intended being present at Mrs. Jenkinson's garden-party and she was anxious that he should keep his engagement, because she had made up her mind to say a few words to him upon a rather disagreeable subject. To Lady Elizabeth she only said:

'I don't know why he isn't here; I dare say he will put in an appearance later. But hadn't you better send him a more formal invitation?'

'Oh, of course; only I want to make sure

of his accepting it, don't you see?' answered the old lady, whose candour, it must be confessed, was not always judicious. She now turned away to speak to little Canon Pickersgill, while Ida, with a slightly-clouded brow, mused over the significance of that last statement of hers.

Ida Chaine was as indifferent to the gossip in which it might please her neighbours to indulge about her behind her back as most of us pretend to be and probably a good deal more so than most of us really are; but she was neither young enough nor foolish enough to disregard that particular kind of gossip which no woman can afford to disregard; and if—as her husband assured her was the case—people were beginning to make unpleasant remarks about her intimacy with Leonard Fraser, it would perhaps be better that that intimacy should cease. This was what she proposed to tell him; and she was very sorry that it should be necessary to do so, because she liked the man and knew that he would miss her society no less than she would miss

his. Besides, it was a ridiculous and undignified sort of thing to be compelled to say.

It was, at any rate, very far from being what Leonard Fraser expected to hear when he joined the Bishop's guests rather late in the afternoon and lost no time in seeking out the lady whose presence there was the sole reason for his own.

'I have just been looking in at the cathedral,' he said, the moment after he had shaken hands with her; 'they are going to have Spohr's anthem, "The Earth is the Lord's." Wouldn't you like to go and hear it? We can get there before they begin if we slip off at once, and nobody will miss us out of this crowd.'

Ida hesitated. It seemed likely enough that she would be able to effect her escape unnoticed and it occurred to her that she could more easily discharge the distasteful task which she had imposed upon herself on her way to or from the cathedral than amongst a number of inquisitive persons, any one of whom might chance to overhear what she was

talking about. On the other hand, there was the risk of John's seeing her walk away in the company of the man of whom he was now openly and undisguisedly jealous.

'I should like very well to hear the anthem,' she answered doubtfully; 'but I am not sure whether I ought to absent myself for such a long time. My husband, who hates this sort of thing, may want to go away.'

'Oh, if he wants to go, he will go; I think we may trust him for that,' returned Fraser, laughing. 'He will send the carriage back for you if he drives home; but it is much more likely that he will betake himself to the club—unless, indeed, he is there already.'

It was, in truth, John's habit to seek refuge in the county club within ten minutes or a quarter of an hour after escorting his wife to one of those afternoon entertainments which his soul loathed; and since he was not now in sight, Ida thought it highly probable that he had done as he was wont to do.

'Very well,' she answered, getting up suddenly, after a further short pause for consideration; 'I suppose there can't be much harm in our going to church, and I doubt whether even John himself could be more bored than I am with these people.'

All the same, she was aware that what she was doing was unconventional and dangerous. She might, no doubt, have sneaked quietly away; but at the last moment she decided that she would not behave as though she were ashamed of herself, and being a lady whose stature was commanding and whose gait was deliberate, she could not reasonably expect that her exit would pass unobserved by anybody. Fraser, for his part, had a conscience so void of offence that he crossed the lawn by her side without the slightest uneasiness and was surprised by her preoccupied air, as well as by her apparent failure to hear a word of what he was saying.

'Is anything the matter?' he asked, as soon as they had gained the seclusion of the

cloisters. 'You don't seem like yourself to-day, somehow.'

'Well, yes; I have been rather put out,' she replied hurriedly; 'I will tell you about it afterwards. Let us hear the music in peace before we begin to talk about unpleasant things.'

'By all means,' agreed her companion, who had no suspicion of what she was alluding to and who was really more interested for the moment in the music than he was in her.

So the remainder of their short walk was accomplished without further words, and Ida listened to the anthem in the peace which she coveted and which she certainly would not have enjoyed, had she known what was being said and insinuated about her at that time in Bishop Jenkinson's garden. For of course her departure had been witnessed, and of course comments of a more or less uncharitable description had been passed upon it. None of them, it is true, were altogether justified by the circumstances, nor are any of them worth recording, unless it be those of Wilfrid

Chaine, who had dutifully escorted his mother and his cousin to the Bishop's residence and whose sharp eyes saw many things to which it might have been desirable that they should remain blind.

'I hear,' he remarked blandly to his brother, who had not gone to the club but was staring at four lawn-tennis players, whose performances did not seem to interest him very much—'I hear that Mr. Fraser's musical charms have soothed your savage breast and that he is quite *l'ami de la maison* with you.'

'If that means in English that Fraser is a friend of mine, you have been misinformed,' answered John grumpily; 'for a more objectionable brute I never met. Goodness knows *I* don't want him to be always hanging about the place with his beastly fiddle.'

'Ah; I imagined that his fascinations wouldn't be altogether in your line. I suppose he is your wife's friend, then? She and he have just started off together for a walk, I see. At least I presume that they must

have gone for a walk, as they have left the premises.'

John whisked round suddenly, with an oath which was not so effectually smothered as to be inaudible to his tormentor.

'Left the premises!' he repeated; 'what do you mean? Where have they gone?'

'My dear fellow, how should I know? I hadn't the impertinence to ask them where they were going. Surely you are not such a goose as to be jealous.'

'I am not in the least jealous,' answered John; 'but I don't choose to have my wife chattered about, and I don't mind telling you that people have been chattering about her and that infernal, greasy-headed muff. That sort of thing must be put a stop to before it goes any further.'

'Poor old John!' said Wilfrid, with a compassionate smile; 'so you really think that it is possible to marry a pretty woman and to put a stop to any gossip that may be circulated about her? How will you set to work to do that, I wonder! In order to carry

through such a task successfully, it is before all things necessary to obtain the co-operation of the pretty woman, and the unlucky part of it is that pretty women don't, as a rule, object to being gossipped about. If you will be advised by me, you will shut your eyes and hold your tongue. I don't say that you will save your dignity in that way, because married men never have any dignity to speak of; but at least you may hope to avoid being laughed at.'

This kindly counsel had precisely the effect which it had been intended to have. John did not deign to reply, but marched straight off towards the gate, with the resolute air of one who has decided upon his plan of action, and Wilfrid, watching his precipitate departure, smiled complacently.

'Now there is going to be a nice row,' he thought to himself. 'Well, if I could find a taker, I think I might make so bold as to lay a trifle of odds upon the lady. All the same, her victory is likely to cost her dear; for the governor's method of punishing John

won't be quite what she would wish for in her calmer moments. Let us hope that she may derive some consolation from the thought that, if she has cut off her nose, she has succeeded in spiting her face.'

CHAPTER XI

JOHN LOSES HIS TEMPER

JOHN CHAINE set forth in quest of his wife with clenched teeth and throbbing pulses. Wilfrid's compassionate contempt had infuriated him, and it was in truth against Ida that he was infuriated, although he flattered himself that all the indignation which he felt had been aroused by the impudence of that despicable amateur musician, to whom he promised himself the pleasure of reading a sharp lesson. Ida had, of course, been guilty of a foolish indiscretion, and it can never be very pleasant to know that your wife has been indiscreet; but her offence was a small matter in comparison with that of her companion, who must have been perfectly well aware that he could not act as he had done without compromising a lady and who was doubtless at that very moment glorying

in the apparent favour conferred upon him. Well, he should be taught, once for all, that that kind of behaviour was not permissible and would not be permitted.

Poor John was one of those excessively humble persons who, by reason of their sensitiveness, are seldom credited with humility. Like so many dogs who pass for being nasty-tempered brutes, he could not help snapping when some clumsy person hurt his feelings; he was excitable and irritable, and when he tried to control himself he generally only succeeded in appearing sulky. Of all this he was painfully and remorsefully conscious; he believed, too, that he was repulsively ugly as well as abnormally stupid, except perhaps in respect of agricultural knowledge; and, with such a charming list of qualities, how could he suppose it possible for a young and beautiful woman to fall in love with him? He had not supposed anything of the sort, nor had Ida ever deceived him upon the subject. He had been content, and more than content, to marry her without possessing her love, since she had

been content to marry him upon those terms; and if he had found their compact a very much harder one to carry out than he had anticipated, that was probably his own fault, not hers.

Nevertheless, he had not bargained for her falling in love with somebody else. Even now he did not admit explicitly the thought that she had done so, nor did he propose to upbraid her with having in so marked a manner shown her predilection for the society of Leonard Fraser. What he did propose to do, and what it was not only his right but his duty to do, was to protect her from malevolent slander. He felt that he was upon strong ground there. A husband must not allow his wife to be talked about, and he would take very good care that Ida should not be talked about.

Revolving these reflections in a disturbed mind, John strode out of the Precincts and had marched nearly the whole length of the High Street of St. Albyn's before it occurred to him that, wherever the two de-

linquents might be, they were scarcely likely to be found flattening their noses against the shop-windows. Then he whisked round and retraced his steps, nursing his wrath as he went. He would have done better to go through some brief mental rehearsal of the scene in which he intended to play a leading part, for the leading part in such scenes is not quite the easiest thing in the world to play; but he was too angry to bother himself with details. His one and only clear idea was that it behoved him to send that fellow Fraser about his business. As to the precise method by which that end was to be attained, that was a matter of minor importance: language adequate to the occasion would, no doubt, suggest itself to him at the proper time. It will thus be obvious to all cool-headed persons that he was irrevocably foredoomed to make an ass of himself at the proper time.

Ida, for her part, was tolerably cool-headed, and as she also had the prospect of a rather awkward interview before her, she did not omit to prepare herself for it while kneeling

beside Leonard Fraser in the cool, dark cathedral. She ought, of course, to have been saying her prayers; but generous readers, who may possibly have sometimes allowed their own thoughts to wander when they have been upon their knees, will not judge a harassed fellow-creature too harshly for this neglect of her religious obligations. When she and her escort had once more emerged into the close and were strolling, side by side, across the turf, she was quite ready for the task which she felt to be incumbent upon her.

'You asked me just now, Mr. Fraser,' she began, interrupting his criticisms upon the choir and the organist, 'whether anything was the matter, and I said I would tell you about it afterwards. I should have had to tell you anyhow, because it refers to you. I am very sorry for it; but I am afraid there must be an end of our musical afternoons.'

'An end of them!' echoed Fraser, standing still in unaffected dismay. 'But why? Are

you tired of playing with me? Or is it that you don't care to work at the kind of music which we have been doing lately?'

'No, of course not. But I dare say you can understand that, in a neighbourhood like this—or, indeed, in any country neighbourhood—one isn't free to do everything that one would like to do. These good people, you see, are far too clever to believe the truth. If I swore to them upon my deathbed that your only object in coming to the White House every day had been to practise Schubert with an indifferent accompanist, they would only smile and shake their heads.'

If the whole truth must be told, this frank statement was scarcely as disagreeable to Leonard Fraser as it ought to have been. Although the sentiments which he entertained for Mrs. John Chaine were those of the purest and simplest friendship, his vanity was tickled by the suggestion that they might be of a warmer description and that she was aware of it. Consequently, it was

not without a certain air of coxcombry that he said:

'Don't you think we can afford to disregard the empty chatter of empty-headed folks?'

'You can, perhaps,' answered Ida, who was not looking at him; 'I doubt whether I could. It isn't that I care so very much about what may be said of me behind my back; but I don't choose to give any one an excuse for telling me to my face that I have outraged propriety, and——'

'Who has dared to say such a thing as that to you?' interrupted Fraser hotly.

'Oh, the degree of audacity required for the purpose isn't beyond the reach of those who have a legal right to issue commands to me.'

'You mean your husband? Well, all I can say is that your husband has no legal right to insult you and no moral right to assume that you have outraged propriety in any way. You pay him far too high a compliment when you submit to be bullied by him.'

'I have not been bullied by him; and I would rather not discuss him, if you please,' returned Ida, with a touch of displeasure in her voice. 'He was quite entitled to tell me that I was acting unwisely by receiving you every day and that people had begun to notice it. The fact, I suppose, is that people always notice, and always put the worst construction upon, an intimacy between a married woman and a bachelor. It is annoying and, in a way, insulting; but it is so, and there is no help for it.'

'Only you said just now that you didn't care what remarks might be made about you behind your back.'

'I said I didn't care very much—I do care a little. Besides, it isn't worth while to put oneself in the wrong. I shall miss you and I shall miss the music dreadfully; still I am sure you must see that I have no choice but to make the sacrifice.'

Fraser made an impatient gesture.

'No,' he answered, 'I don't see that at all; I only see that you are inclined to make

yourself the slave of your husband's ill-tempered caprices, which is a very great mistake. You have done nothing wrong; and if you seem to admit that you have, he will reward you by trampling upon you for the rest of your life.'

Ida thought it extremely probable that he would; but she was determined neither to complain of John nor to allow him to be condemned in her presence. So she said, in a tone which was intended to preclude further argument:

'I have spoken plainly to you, Mr. Fraser, because I thought it was more friendly and more honest to do so than to shut my door in your face without a word of explanation; but I hoped you would understand that my mind was made up and that I could not very well say more to you than I have said. Now we ought to go back to Mrs. Jenkinson's; it must be nearly time for me to take leave of her.'

'Do you really mean, then, that we are to be strangers henceforth?' asked Fraser in consternation.

'There will be no occasion for us to be strangers; that would be ridiculous. But I am afraid we must give up practising pieces arranged for the piano and the violin.'

She looked so resolute, and so calm withal, that Fraser's heart sank within him.

'It is very hard lines!' he could not help exclaiming. 'You won't suffer me to say what I think will be the effect of this—this surrender upon you; but perhaps I may venture to tell you what the effect will be upon me. It will simply drive me out of house and home, that is all. I could have endured my life and performed what I presume I ought to regard as my duties tolerably well, if I had had the prospect of an occasional half-holiday to cheer me up; but, since I am to be deprived of that, I must let Hatton Park and take myself off somewhere out of sight. The old ladies were beginning to be so nice and civil to me too! They won't keep up their civility, though, after they hear that I have fallen into disgrace; and, even if they did, their civility would hardly be sufficient to

console me. No; there's no doubt about it—I must give in and beat a retreat!'

'Oh, nonsense!' returned Ida, laughing rather unsympathetically. 'There is no reason in the world why you should go away unless you want to go. But if you do want to leave Southshire, you are lucky in being at liberty to please yourself. I really think that I am a good deal more to be pitied than you.'

'You will regret the poor old fiddle a little bit, then?'

'Naturally I shall, considering that our practising has been the one and only pleasure of my existence. I shall never care to touch the piano again now.'

'Yet you are determined to make a sacrifice for which you will get no thanks. After this you will be perpetually asked to make sacrifices, and you will never be thanked for making them. Of course, if you tell me that I am not to visit you any more, I must remain away; but upon my word, when I think of the utter uselessness of this, I have half a mind to disobey you. You are trying to propitiate a

man who isn't capable of being propitiated by submission.'

'That may or may not be the case,' returned Ida, drawing herself up. 'It does not follow that I am trying to propitiate my husband because I think myself bound to respect his wishes—and even his prejudices. However, as I said before, I do not wish to discuss him with you.'

After that rebuke, Mr. Fraser could only hold his tongue and stick his chin into the air.

During the latter part of the above colloquy he and his companion had been standing still in a corner of the cloisters; but they now resumed their walk, and were within a short distance of the Bishop's door when a heated gentleman, with red hair and a redder face, bounced suddenly out upon them and barred their passage.

'I have been searching high and low for you, Ida,' John began, throwing an angry, sidelong scowl at the musician; 'may I ask where you have been all this time?'

'We have been to afternoon service at the cathedral—if that matters,' answered Ida composedly.

'It matters a great deal. At any rate, it matters that you should show yourself at a garden-party, where all the old cats in the place could see you, and then take to your heels without a word of excuse or apology. As for your having been at the afternoon service, all I know is that I met old Tyler quite twenty minutes ago, and he told me he had been reading the lessons. I should have thought you might have given old Tyler a couple of hundred yards' start and a beating.'

'Very likely we might, if the race had been arranged,' Ida replied; 'but as it wasn't, and as we could not guess that you were searching high and low for us, we didn't hurry ourselves. If you doubt the fact of our having been at the cathedral at all, we can call the verger as a witness.'

Her manner was decidedly provoking, and it is not impossible that she meant it to

be so. After all, a woman who has resolved to do her duty in despite of her inclinations may be pardoned for indemnifying herself by such sharp little verbal thrusts as she may have at command. But John, who did not know how admirable his wife's intentions were and who hated nothing so much as being laughed at, grew redder and angrier.

'I don't doubt your word,' he answered roughly, 'and I'm sure I don't care whether you have been at the cathedral or not; only I hope that when you next want to go there from a garden-party where everybody has seen you, you will be sensible enough to go alone.'

'Whatever I may do in future will probably be done alone,' returned Ida, who was highly incensed against her husband for scolding her in the presence of another man. 'I have just been explaining to Mr. Fraser that you object to my seeing or speaking to anybody.'

'Oh, indeed! Well, it's hardly worth while to explain to Mr. Fraser that that is not the case. He is probably very well aware of

what it is that I object to, and perhaps he will be so kind as to take it from me that he will not be permitted to make an exhibition of you in this way a second time. I should advise him not to attempt anything of the kind, however good fun he may think it.'

It may be laid down as a general rule that a man who has lost his temper should be allowed to say exactly what he pleases; because in that case he will certainly say more than he means and will in all likelihood have to apologise humbly on recovering his self-possession. But Leonard Fraser, whose own temper was far from being under proper discipline, thought fit to rejoin:

'This is intolerable, Mr. Chaine! You are bringing accusations against me which I can't submit to, and ought not to submit to if I could. You insult Mrs. Chaine even more than you insult me by such language.'

It is by no means unlikely that the infuriated John would have knocked the man down then and there if his wife had not caught him resolutely by the arm.

'I think we had better go and take leave of Mrs. Jenkinson now,' said she; 'you cannot possibly humiliate me more than you have done already, though you might perhaps manage to inflict some further humiliation upon yourself. Good-bye, Mr. Fraser. I am sorry that you have been treated to such an absurd scene; but I dare say you will be good enough to make allowances. After what has passed, I may withdraw what I said to you just now; and I shall be glad to see you, as usual, if you care to come and practise with me. That is, of course, unless my husband chooses to forbid it.'

John submitted to be led away like a naughty little boy and, indeed, presented very much the appearance of one. His wrath evaporated under the chilling influence of his wife's composure; so that presently he endeavoured, in a somewhat sullen and hang-dog fashion, to make his peace with her.

'I suppose I spoke too forcibly,' he confessed; 'but I was a good deal put out, and I don't think you can wonder at it. It was all

that cad's fault! If he hadn't stood and grinned at me, I could have given him the snub that he requires without paying him the compliment of getting into a rage with him.'

'Could you?' returned Ida, with supreme disdain. 'I should have thought that you were better qualified to pick quarrels with people than to snub them; but you will have to adopt such measures as may seem wisest to you in future, for I shall not trouble myself again to study your caprices. I see now that I made a great mistake in asking Mr. Fraser to discontinue his visits; but, as you heard, I withdrew my request. It only remains for you to forbid him the house.'

John hung his head. He still thought that he had been in the right and that he had had great provocation; but somehow or other he seemed to have put himself in the wrong. That being so, he could only keep silence and hope that Ida would forgive him.

CHAPTER XII

THE DEAN IS RELIEVED

When Mr. and Mrs. John Chaine reappeared at the Bishop's garden-party—which by that time was beginning to break up—they had to run the gauntlet of a good many inquisitive pairs of eyes; and, as may well be supposed, their respective countenances told a tale which was legible enough to those who were interested in looking out for one. Amongst the inquisitive persons, however, was not Lady Elizabeth, whose powers of observation were none of the keenest and whose opinion it was that her daughter-in-law was remarkably well able to take care of herself.

'So here you are at last,' she said placidly, as the latter approached her. 'What have you done with your friend? Did you tell him that I wanted him to come to dinner?'

Ida had to confess that this commission had escaped her memory.

'I really had not an opportunity of saying much to him,' she added. 'We went to the cathedral to hear the anthem, and soon after we came out we met John. I think Mr. Fraser has gone home now.'

She spoke in rather loud and distinct accents, for she was conscious of being eagerly listened to by a select audience, and it seemed to her only prudent to let St. Albyn's hear how innocently she had been employed. But St. Albyn's, unfortunately, knew to a moment the time occupied by the cathedral services; so that her statement only provoked an interchange of subdued smiles and knowing glances; and when, a few minutes later, the Chaine family departed *en masse*, the old ladies (and, for the matter of that, the old gentlemen too) were provided with material for a thoroughly enjoyable chat.

One old gentleman, before whom it was impossible to converse with that freedom which the circumstances warranted, betook

himself homewards in a vexed and uneasy frame of mind. The Dean of St. Albyn's had never, in the whole course of his life, been guilty of scandalising his neighbours, and he could not understand why others should be so perverse as to err in such a way. Ida, to be sure, had always been rather perverse; yet even Ida, one would have thought, might have had more sense than to enrage her husband and set all the tongues in the place in motion by advertising her infatuation for a man who could scarcely be called a gentleman. The good Dean was almost as much surprised as he was distressed, and he felt that it would be only right to say a few words of kindly warning to his daughter. He had not seen much of her since her marriage. He had dined two or three times at the White House, and two or three times Ida had driven in to St. Albyn's to interview his housekeeper and ascertain that he was being properly looked after; but their relations had not been affectionate, and at the bottom of his heart he knew very well that she still cherished a grudge against him

on account of his conduct with regard to young Mayne. Well, she had apparently forgotten young Mayne now. That was quite as it should be; nor, perhaps, was there anything intrinsically blameworthy in her present intimacy with young Fraser. Still, she ought to be made aware that such intimacies are always dangerous. The only difficulty was, how to make her aware of it without giving offence; for the Dean, as has already been mentioned, was a good deal in awe of his daughter.

Nevertheless, his sense of duty being so keen, he nerved himself for the performance of a distasteful task; and on the following afternoon he walked across the fields towards Chaine Court—a venerable, benevolent-looking figure in his apron and broad-brimmed, rosetted hat, arriving at the White House just in time for five o'clock tea.

Ida, who was sitting by the open window in the drawingroom, witnessed his approach from afar and at once divined his errand. It was not her father's habit to take long walks

for the mere pleasure of seeing her. She received him as she was accustomed to receive him—that is to say, coldly enough—and when she had given him a cup of tea and had listened for a quarter of an hour or so to the panegyric which he judged it appropriate to bestow upon her excellent, hard-working husband, endeavoured to lead him gently to the point. The truth was that she was not sure whether Leonard Fraser might not drop in presently, in response to her emphatic invitation.

'I think the cathedral choir has improved,' she remarked. 'I was there for a short time yesterday afternoon.'

'Ah, yes; so I understood,' answered the Dean, rising to the fly with somewhat suspicious alacrity. 'Well, my dear, I am very glad that you should continue to take an interest in our services; but I think, if you will excuse my saying so, that your going to the cathedral yesterday was a slight error in judgment. For one thing, it was scarcely polite to our good friend Mrs. Jenkinson.'

'I admit that it was not polite to Mrs. Jenkinson; but I hoped that she wouldn't miss me. However, perhaps that was not quite the worst feature of my error in judgment.'

'Well, my dear, since you put it in that way, perhaps it was not. Those whose consciences are at ease, as I am sure that yours is, may be justified in behaving—shall we say, a little unconventionally? They may be perfectly within their right in urging that charity thinketh no evil; still——'

'Still, unless they are downright idiots they will not expect to be charitably spoken of.'

'Quite so, my dear child; and that is why I was sorry to see you walk away, and remain away such a long time, yesterday with Mr. Fraser. I thought it a pity—yes, I certainly thought it a pity; and I have the less hesitation in giving you my opinion because I strongly suspect that it was shared by your husband.'

'It was so completely shared by my husband,' replied Ida calmly, 'that he was pleased to express it in forcible terms to Mr. Fraser as

well as to me. I should not be in the least surprised if he were to express it even more forcibly before long by kicking Mr. Fraser out of the house.'

The Dean shook his head gravely.

'Mr. Fraser ought not to be admitted into your house again,' said he. 'You are evidently irritated, Ida; and I do not say that your irritation is without excuse. You should remember, however, that John also has had reason to be irritated; and you should abstain from taxing his forbearance any further. Married people, believe me, cannot hope to live happily together without some concessions on both sides.'

'I do not know what concessions John has ever made, or is likely to make, to me,' answered Ida; 'but I may tell you that I made a concession to his ridiculous jealousy yesterday by requesting Mr. Fraser not to come here any more. It was not a very pleasant request to have to make: still, I made it for the sake of a quiet life.'

'And you were right, my dear,' the Dean

declared, with an air of decision, accompanied by relief: 'you were unquestionably right.'

'No; I believe I was wrong, and therefore I have withdrawn my request. This is John's house, and he can shut his door against any man who is obnoxious to him; but, since he has chosen to take matters into his own hands, he may manage them in his own way. After being lectured before Mr. Fraser, I do not feel bound to give him any assistance.'

The Dean, though much provoked and disappointed, endeavoured to be conciliatory. He pointed out to his daughter that resentment, however justifiable in itself, is always un-Christian and generally unwise; he reminded her that this man Fraser was after all hardly worthy of being treated as a bone of contention between her and her husband, and he gave utterance to many sentiments which, besides being admirably expressed, were more or less apposite to her case. But he did not succeed in moving her. She listened to him without impatience and without disrespect, only she did not take the

trouble to argue with him; and when he had quite done, she gave him to understand that she was still of the same mind as she had been before he began.

This was most discouraging, and the Dean, when he was discouraged or thwarted, was apt to forget his dignity. He forgot it now by giving his daughter a sound rating, which disturbed her no more than his previous homily had done, and finally he went away, very hot and very unhappy. Who but a woman—and who, even among women, except Ida—would have been so impervious to the counsels of prudence and common sense? It was, at all events, plain that nothing could be done with Ida; so this well-meaning and sorely-tried man, as he went his way through the woods in the cool of the summer afternoon, bethought himself of the advisability of seeking an interview with his son-in-law. John, albeit an obstinate, thick-headed donkey — the Dean did not always mince his words when communing with himself—was at least a man, and might

be reasoned with. It would surely be possible, by taking him in the right way, to make him understand that he had been guilty of a grave injustice to his wife which she could not be expected to overlook.

Accordingly, the Dean, regardless of his personal comfort and of the circumstance that he would hardly reach home in time for dinner unless he hurried himself, hung about the vicinity for another quarter of an hour, and was at length rewarded by hearing the sound of approaching footsteps. The steps, however, were not those of John, but of old Mr. Chaine, who, leaning upon the arm of his son Wilfrid, was taking a turn round his demesne, and who raised his hat when he recognised the Dean of St. Albyn's. Mr. Chaine never failed to pay this tribute of respect to the sacred office of the clergy, strongly though he disapproved of the sacerdotal tendencies of the age.

'How do you do, Mr. Dean?' said he. 'You have been to the White House, perhaps?

I trust that you found your daughter pretty well?'

'Pretty well in health, thank you,' answered the Dean, with an air of dignified reserve, after shaking hands with the old gentleman. 'Yes; very fairly well in health.'

It seemed desirable to take up that line, lest the Chaine family should have ranged itself upon John's side—in which case his obvious duty would be to make the most of the injury inflicted upon his daughter; but Mr. Chaine's next words showed that no danger of that kind was to be apprehended.

'I will not affect to misunderstand your allusion, Mr. Dean,' the old man said; 'I will only ask you to believe that I have been as much distressed by what occurred yesterday as either you or Ida can be. I have heard about it from Wilfrid, who saw his brother to-day, and I intend to speak my mind very plainly to John upon the subject.'

The Dean's features relaxed and a sigh of satisfaction escaped him.

'Well, well,' he answered, 'we must not make too serious a business out of a lovers' quarrel. I must confess, to be quite honest, that I walked over with the intention of scolding poor Ida, because I thought she had behaved rather imprudently; but, after hearing her story, I could not but feel that she had been somewhat hardly dealt with. Ida is proud and sensitive—she inherits those qualities from me, I fear, so that it does not become me to blame her on that account—and she has difficulty in submitting tamely to injustice. Perhaps, however, the best plan is to let the matter drop.'

Mr. Chaine made a decisive gesture of dissent.

'I should be glad if I were able to think so,' said he; 'but I cannot take that view. No one can be more averse than I am to interfering between husband and wife; yet I take it that a father must always remain to some extent responsible for his son, and it would be a distinct neglect of duty on my part were I to take no notice of John's most

unjustifiable conduct. I shall have a word or two to say to him about it by and by. If a married woman is to be called imprudent for walking a few hundred yards in the company of an acquaintance on her way to attend divine service, the morality of English society must indeed have fallen to a low ebb!'

A fugitive smile flitted across the features of Wilfrid, who may have thought that he knew a little more about the morality of English society than his father did. But it was in a tone of befitting gravity that he said—

'I can't deny that John has been guilty; still, I can answer for it that he is repentant. When all is said, his guilt only consists in the fact that he has been silly enough to be jealous. Well, I suppose nobody would be silly enough to be jealous if he could help it.'

'Every man of John's age ought to be able to control himself,' returned Mr. Chaine severely. 'John has not attempted to do this, and unless he is taught to do it, he will bring endless unhappiness upon innocent persons.

Your defence of your brother is neither a sufficient nor a reasonable one, Wilfrid.'

Possibly that might have been accounted for by the circumstance that it had not been intended to be either the one or the other; but how was an honest, simple-minded, prejudiced old gentleman, whose brain had discharged its functions sluggishly of late, to fathom the intentions of a really accomplished and unscrupulous schemer? Wilfrid looked down and appeared to be searching in vain for some rejoinder, while the Dean, perfectly satisfied with the turn which matters were taking, remarked—

'Well, I must be going. I will not presume to dictate to you in any way, Mr. Chaine; and if you think that you ought to —er—rebuke your son, you will of course do what you believe to be right. Personally, however, I think, as I said before, that the affair might be allowed to drop. Those who have right on their side can very well afford to be generous.'

'That is a worthy man,' observed Mr.

Chaine, as the Dean walked away; 'but a little weak, I should think, and naturally unacquainted with John's character. He does not see the true significance of what he treats as a trifling incident; nor, I suspect, do you. With John one cannot afford to be weak; if I had been weak with him in former years, he would, in all probability, have been a ruined and disgraced man by now.'

'Well, sir,' returned Wilfrid, 'I hope you won't put his back up, that's all. John is a nasty customer when he gets into a rage; and I must say that I shouldn't much like even you to teach me my duty to my wife, if I had one.'

'When you have a wife, and when you fail in your duty to her, you may be very sure that you will have to reckon with me,' answered his father grimly. 'While I live, I will be what I have always been, the master of my own children. Come, let us go home.'

CHAPTER XIII

JOHN'S CORRESPONDENT

It is all very well to say, as old Mr. Chaine had said, that a man who is no longer young ought at least to know how to control himself; but some men are incapacitated by physical and mental conditions from ever learning that lesson, and it might be remembered, in extenuation of this ineptitude on their part, that their outbursts of anger, which are generally short-lived, are almost invariably followed by periods of deep despondency and remorse. Such, at all events, was the case with John Chaine, who, conscious that he had behaved with unwarrantable roughness and discourtesy to his wife, endeavoured by every means in his power to persuade her of his contrition and obtain her pardon. No doubt the means which he had at command were

restricted; no doubt, also, he used them after a stupid and uncouth fashion; still, he might have made his peace with her if she had been disposed to advance a single step to meet him. Unhappily, she was not so disposed. She stood upon her dignity and held him at arm's length, with polite assurances that she really did not wish him to apologise any more. The episode, she gave him to understand, was at an end; it could not, of course, be obliterated; but it might be suffered to drop into the background without further allusion. In short, she explained, as clearly as could be done without definite words to that effect, that she did not mean to forgive him, although she was prepared to submit to him, in accordance with the laws, human and divine, which are supposed to govern the relations between husband and wife.

This, naturally enough, was not at all what the penitent offender wanted; and when it became evident to him that he would get nothing more, his penitence began again to give way to impotent indignation. He man-

aged to smother it, however, feeling that he had deserved some punishment; nor did he openly resent the very severe admonition which his father saw fit to inflict upon him.

'I admit that I allowed my temper to get the better of me, sir,' was his only reply. 'I have already admitted that to Ida, and I have begged her pardon.'

'You could do no less,' returned the old man, rather ungraciously. 'I presume that you have also begged Mr. Fraser's pardon; for I understand from Wilfrid that you confess to having grossly insulted him. If not, I trust that you will take an early opportunity of doing so.'

'That is another matter,' said John, his combativeness reviving. 'I don't remember exactly what I said to the man; but I hardly think that my language could have been described as grossly insulting. He deliberately did what he must have known would expose my wife to be talked about in connection with him; and I believe I told him that he wouldn't

have a second chance of so distinguishing himself. I'm not going to beg his pardon for that.'

The truth was that, so far from being inclined to beg Leonard Fraser's pardon, nothing would, in his present mood, have afforded him more unfeigned delight than a colourable pretext for horsewhipping that blameless musician within an inch of his life. Fraser, after all, was the fount and origin of his misery; and the worst of it was that, notwithstanding what had passed, Fraser had calmly resumed his daily visits to the White House. John was aware of this —indeed no secret was made of the fact— and he could not quite see his way to forbidding a practice of which he had expressed his strong disapproval. If the man did not mind making himself at home in a house against the wish of its master, and if Ida did not choose to refrain from welcoming him, they must do as they pleased about it. He should have supposed that between them they could have mustered up sufficient pride to

refrain from acting in that way; but they would not be interfered with by him.

For his own part, he made up his mind that he would not, if he could help it, meet this obnoxious neighbour of his again. He really couldn't be civil to the fellow; and, in the absence of any legitimate excuse for hitting him in the face, the best thing to be done was to keep out of his way. Consequently, he took care not to return home in the evening until the coast was clear; and when Lady Elizabeth gave her projected dinner-party, that gathering was not graced by the presence of her eldest son, who excused himself upon the plea of fatigue.

It is needless to add that he was not missed. He had not expected to be missed; yet it was probably with some vague expectation or other that he sat up to await his wife's return, for as a rule he kept very early hours. The clock upon the mantelpiece had struck twelve before she made her appearance.

'Well,' he said, 'you must have had a very long, dull evening, I am afraid.'

'Not at all, thank you,' answered Ida, in the cool, distant accents which she had always employed of late when addressing him; 'on the contrary, I enjoyed it a great deal more than any dinner-party I have been at since I came here.'

Under all the circumstances that was not a very flattering speech.

'I suppose,' John was stung into remarking, 'your friend was there, with his instrument of torture?'

It was the first time that he had mentioned the violinist to her since that unlucky encounter of theirs on the afternoon of the Bishop's garden-party, although he had more than once allowed some disparaging observations upon the subject of amateur musicians in general to escape him.

'I thought you knew that Mr. Fraser was to be there,' replied Ida, who no longer cared to disguise the contempt which she felt for her husband and which she probably would not have felt had he been less reluctant to assert his authority. 'Indeed, I thought that that

was why you chose to stay at home. Luckily, there are not many people who agree with you in considering the violin an instrument of torture. Mr. Fraser played superbly this evening, and everybody was enchanted with him.'

'Then everybody was enchanted with a pretentious, effeminate snob; that's all I can say,' exclaimed the irascible John. 'Such an animal wouldn't be tolerated for a moment in any decent club. How women who are well-born and well-bred can make the mistakes that they do about men fairly passes my comprehension.'

'That I can well believe,' returned Ida, with disdainful composure; 'you really should not expect to be able to comprehend everything.'

She allowed him time to retaliate, and then, as he did not see fit to do so, marched out with the honours of war, leaving a perplexed and angry man behind her.

What was he to say or do? He was persuaded by this time that his wife was

becoming much too fond of the pretentious and effeminate snob; yet he could not quite bring himself to tell her point-blank that she must drop him, and it was only too obvious that nothing short of a downright command would induce her to do so. He could not even feel sure that she would obey a command; nor, if she should refuse to obey, would she be likely to lack support from his father and mother — who ought surely by rights to have been upon his side. Everybody and everything seemed to be against him.

However, there was just one person who had always treated him with a patronising sort of kindliness and who had of late shown more appearance of sympathy with him than the rest of the world; so that, when he rode out after breakfast, as usual, the next morning, and chanced upon Wilfrid strolling across the park, he was greatly minded to unbosom himself to his younger brother.

He dismounted, and, after a few prefatory observations, related his tale of distress.

Things, he said, could not go on as they had been doing latterly—flesh and blood could not endure such a daily ordeal.

'In short, it simply comes to this—am I to be master in my own house, or am I not?'

'Ah,' answered Wilfrid, smiling, 'that is a question for you to decide. It is one of those extremely difficult points—like the amount of sugar that ought to be put into claret-cup—which can only be left to individual taste.'

'Well, of course it is a question for me to decide,' returned John impatiently; 'but I want to know what you would advise.'

'Oh, if you put it in that way, I have no hesitation in answering that I should recommend you to take a back seat. That, I can assure you, is what most husbands have to do, and it saves friction if they recognise the necessity at once. You see, one of the chief drawbacks of matrimony is that a husband can't very well put his oar in, without seeming to be a brute, until matters have gone so far that they are past mending. Not, of course, that I think there is any danger of a

catastrophe in your case — Heaven forbid! Only I think, if I were you, I should educate myself to regard the violinist as an inevitable nuisance. It really isn't so difficult: lots of men contrive to educate themselves after that fashion and are quite happy.'

'I should prefer to educate him a little bit,' replied John, with compressed lips.

'Naturally you would, because you are such a confoundedly masterful chap; but it is compromise, my dear John, that makes the world go round, and most of us must be content to get our own way when we can, without enforcing it at the point of the bayonet. That is the little mistake that you make with the governor. He would sanction all the improvements that you want to carry out if only you wouldn't hold a pistol to his head while you suggest them.'

'He will sanction nothing suggested by me,' retorted John bitterly; 'the mere fact of the suggestion coming from that quarter will always suffice to set him against it. And I'm not at all sure that I might not truly say the

same about my wife. Nature never intended me to succeed by means of compromises.'

Wilfrid shrugged his shoulders. 'Put your head down and charge then, you obstinate old bull!' said he, laughing. 'Exasperate the governor until he disinherits you; drive your wife into demanding a separation and kick the fiddler into the next world. Only, when you have scattered devastation around you, don't say I didn't warn you of what would happen.'

'I can't make out whether you mean me to take what you say literally or not, Wilfrid,' answered the elder brother, with a puzzled and rather pained look; 'it doesn't sound like the sort of advice that any reasonable man would give to another. Anyhow it wouldn't be in my power to follow it; I would rather blow out my brains at once than 'educate' myself, as you call it, to submit to things which—well, to things which no man ought to submit to.'

Wilfrid was quite aware of that, and had not for a moment supposed that his counsels would be acted upon. His amiable intention

had been to goad his brother on to the commission of some fresh act of folly, and the method which he had adopted was not ill fitted to bring about that end. He had, however, presumed a shade too much upon his brother's stupidity; for the latter, brooding over their conversation during the remainder of the day, was not free from some misgivings as to the absolute integrity of one who could speak so cynically. More than once the thought crossed John's mind that it might be to Wilfrid's interest that he should make a fool of himself in one way or another, and although he was much ashamed of harbouring such an idea, he could not prevent it from recurring to him.

As chance would have it, his half-formed suspicions received startling confirmation the very next morning in the shape of a long letter signed 'Jessie Viccars.' The writer reminded him that she had been born and bred at St. Albyn's, and, after setting forth the history of her wrongs, declared that she had now lost all hope of their ever being

redressed. Wilfrid, it appeared, had taken no notice of the letters which she had despatched to him since his return home, and she had very little doubt but that his design was not only to desert her but to deny all knowledge of her. 'Which I daresay he thinks he can easily do, for no man living knows how to tell a lie better than he does, and from the first he has taken very good care to keep clear of witnesses.'

John's correspondent went on to state that, although she would not be sorry to have an opportunity of 'serving out' the man who had deceived her, her present action was prompted less by a desire for revenge than by a righteous determination to enlighten one who little suspected the perfidy to which he was in danger of falling a victim. Mrs. Viccars, it seemed, had friends in St. Albyn's who kept her informed of what was going on, and she would have known, even if she had not heard a frank admission of the fact from Wilfrid himself, that he was minded, whether by fair means or foul, to elbow his elder brother aside.

'He will do you all the harm he can, sir; you may rely upon that,' she wrote; 'and if you will be advised by me, you will distrust him most when he seems to be most friendly. He has a coaxing, wheedling tongue—I know that to my cost—but he has no heart and no conscience. He would ruin you, without thinking twice about it, to serve his own purposes, just as he has ruined me; but you can save yourself without ruining him, whereas I can't.'

There was a touch of feminine nature in the last sentence which appeared to John to be genuine and to lend confirmation to assertions which, upon the face of them, were scarcely worthy of credence. That there had been some sort of liaison between this woman and Wilfrid was probable enough; but that Wilfrid had ever promised to marry her sounded about as improbable as anything could be. Wilfrid was ambitious and cool-headed; his wife, if ever he took one, would assuredly be possessed of either rank or wealth; he was the last man in the world to perpetrate anything so suicidal

as an alliance with a woman against whom society would close its doors. Nevertheless, Mrs. Viccars's story seemed to hang together pretty well; and supposing it to be true, the course which she had seen fit to adopt was by no means inexplicable. One could understand that she might be willing to put a spoke in Wilfrid's wheel and yet shrink from the extreme measure of destroying his whole future career by writing to his father. Indeed, she avowed as much. She had thought of putting herself in communication with Mr. Chaine, she said, but her heart had failed her. By so doing she would, of course, have inflicted a crushing blow upon her betrayer; but her own lot would not on that account have been any the less forlorn, and she was not vindictive. Only, as she did not see why the wicked should always be allowed to prosper at the expense of the innocent, she had made so bold as to pen these few words of warning.

John, it must be owned, was a good deal impressed, as well as shocked and grieved. He was most unwilling to believe his brother

guilty of the baseness and treachery imputed to him; yet it was not likely that what Mrs. Viccars had written was pure invention, nor was it very unlikely that Wilfrid, who was so much better fitted to be the master of Chaine Court than he was, should sometimes have dreamt of ousting him. But however that might be, the mere assertion of a self-accused woman could not possibly be accepted without some support in the shape of proof; and after prolonged cogitation he decided to reply to Mrs. Viccars in that sense.

'MADAM' (he wrote the same afternoon)—'Before thanking you for the warning which you have been good enough to address to me, I must be satisfied that the other statements contained in your letter are accurate. It may be that you have been injured by my brother, and it may also very well be that you have no just cause for complaint against him. You will understand that I do not wish to pry into matters with which I have no concern, and you will probably also understand that anything so serious as a definite promise of marriage on my brother's part would, if substantiated, alter my present opinion of him so much that I might be induced to believe in the double dealing of which you accuse him. In the absence of convincing testimony to the fact that he has ever made you such a

promise, I must decline to listen or reply to charges which I am bound to treat, *primâ facie*, as calumnious.

'I am, Madam,

'Your obedient Servant,

'JOHN CHAINE.'

By return of post he received an answer, together with an enclosure which, as his correspondent drily remarked, was of a nature to remove all his doubts. She added, fairly enough, that she was giving evidence not only of her own good faith, but of her confidence in his honour by surrendering a document of so much value and importance to her. It was indeed a valuable and important document, since it was the only compromising one which that very astute personage Wilfrid Chaine had ever been guilty of penning. In this note (which he had dashed off somewhat hastily previous to his recent departure from London) he spoke of his marriage to Jessie Viccars at some future date as an understood thing, and alluded unequivocally to the prospect of his father's demise as affording good ground for

hope that the said date would not be a very distant one. With rather more ambiguity he hinted at the vast improvement in his fortunes which might be brought about by his conduct during the next few weeks, and he concluded by imploring his dearest Jessie to remain patient and silent a little longer and to believe in his unalterable affection.

John threw the letter down with an oath and a gesture of horror and disgust. There could be no question about it, then. Wilfrid, who had seemed to be his only friend, was plotting against him, and would have had an excellent chance of success, but for the impatience of this unfortunate woman, with whom there was every reason to believe that he likewise intended to deal treacherously. Why should he spare such a villain? After a brief inward debate, he decided that he ought not to, and would not, spare him. He picked up the incriminating sheet of paper, thrust it into his breast-pocket, buttoned his coat over it, and, as soon as he had got through his daily round of work,

started off for Chaine Court to demand an audience of his father and unmask the traitor.

It would have been well for him if he had carried out his intention; but by some unlucky freak of Nature he possessed in an exaggerated degree the loyalty in which his younger brother was wholly deficient.

'No; if we are to fight, let us fight fair,' he muttered when he came within sight of the house of his forefathers. 'It is just possible that Wilfrid may be able to explain this away, though I don't see how he is going to do it.'

Accordingly he loitered about the shrubberies until, as he had hoped might happen, Wilfrid emerged from the house alone, and sauntered slowly across the lawn towards him.

CHAPTER XIV

FRASER DISPLAYS FIRMNESS

'Ingenuas didicisse fideliter artes
Emollit mores, nec sinit esse feros.'

With that truth we were all made acquainted in the days when we wore jackets and turn-down collars, and wrote Latin verses, and were whipped for making false quantities; yet few of us have failed to be surprised and disappointed in after life by the apparent inability of art to exercise that refining influence with which it is credited and which it certainly ought to possess. We cannot help observing that artists, musicians and literary men are neither better nor wiser than their neighbours; and what is especially noticeable about them is a lack of that generosity which should surely belong to those whose brain-power exceeds the average. Various explanations of what, at first

sight, looks like a puzzling phenomenon have been put forward from time to time. The excessive irritability of the artistic temperament is, of course, one of them; and it is not without diffidence, reluctance and a due sense of the unpopularity of such a view that the narrator of the present history ventures to suggest his own modest theory—which is that artists are not, as a general rule, men of good birth. If you could take an average gentleman and imbue him with a love of art in some shape or form, together with a capacity for excelling in it, you would doubtless effect a considerable moral improvement in him; but the average gentleman has neither that love nor that capacity, and it is by no manner of means possible to make a gentleman out of the average artist. Thus it is that the blessed principle of compensation steps in to debar any mortals from being too good for the wicked world that we inhabit.

As for Leonard Fraser, his pedigree was respectable enough in the male line; but his immediate progenitors had married

all sorts of people; added to which, he had been deprived of the kind of training and education which English gentlemen usually receive. He was not at all a bad fellow in his way, only it was beyond him to comprehend the instinctive delicacy which was a second nature even to so rough a specimen of humanity as John Chaine. After the scene which had taken place in the cloisters at St. Albyn's between him and that irate individual, it may safely be asserted that he would not, if he had been a gentleman, have cared to resume his visits to the White House; but, being what he was, that was the very thing that—setting aside his own inclinations—he felt in duty bound to do. Mrs. Chaine had pointedly asked him to do so, and he was determined to render implicit obedience to any request that might be conveyed to him by that innocent and ill-used lady. The wishes of her ruffian of a husband he deemed himself entitled to regard as altogether beneath notice. So he carried his violin daily across

the fields to his neighbour's house as of yore, and Ida played his accompaniments for him; and he was not a little elated by the kindness and the compliments of Lady Elizabeth and Lady Hartlepool, and—for the worst that can be said about the poor young man may as well be said at once—he did not greatly object when he heard, as he did from more quarters than one, that his intimacy with Mrs. John Chaine had been a good deal remarked upon. It was so blameless an intimacy that the remarks of the malevolent might very well be smiled at and their insinuations treated for what they were worth.

Ida, for her part, was sensible enough to dread malevolent insinuations, but too proud and too angry to abate anything of her former cordiality towards one whose visits, after all, were the brightest incidents in her life. John might put a stop to those visits if he chose; since he did not choose to do so, it was not for her to admit herself in the wrong by taking the initiative. The

result of all this was that Mr. Fraser and his violin received a warmer welcome than might have been accorded to them but for John's ill-advised behaviour and that the obstinate resolution of the master of the house to remain away from home until close upon the dinner-hour was misinterpreted. He had managed, most unfortunately, to convince his wife that he was a coward as well as a bully. Why in the world he should have been afraid of Leonard Fraser it would be difficult to conceive; but women, whose wits are in some respects so much keener than ours, are apt to become curiously stupid from the moment that they fall under the sway of prejudice. And they are rather easily prejudiced.

At all events, Ida Chaine was far more provoked by her husband's attitude of silent protest than she would have been by any exercise of tyranny on his part. She felt, as he did, that the present state of their relations was intolerable; and it may have been with some vague hope of bringing

about a crisis and clearing the air that she boldly invited Mr. Fraser to stay and dine one evening, after he had laid aside his fiddle.

'We really must try to get that last passage a little better,' she said; 'and if we leave it until to-morrow we shall be sure to lose all the benefit of to-day's practice.'

Fraser was astonished, and had not the good taste to conceal his astonishment.

'Of course I should be only too glad,' he replied; 'but what about your husband? Won't he object to our practising after dinner?'

'I don't think so; he generally falls asleep after dinner. Please don't think of going home to dress, unless you would prefer it.'

Fraser thanked her, but said he would rather dress.

'Besides,' he added, laughing, 'I could not venture to absent myself without giving notice of my intention to my servants, whose humble slave I am. Even as it is,

they will have begun to prepare my dinner, and they will not be pleased with me for having given them that unnecessary trouble.'

He was guilty of no exaggeration in describing himself as the slave of his servants; an unprotected man who keeps a large establishment can hardly avoid being that, although he may, if he knows how to set about it, retain some outward semblance of authority. Leonard Fraser, being quite ignorant of how to set about it, was both ruled and trampled upon by his subordinates, who were not afraid of him and who took a malicious pleasure in irritating him by small impertinences of look and speech which he could not very well notice. A more indulgent master they could not have wished for, and, indeed, he asked nothing better than to live at peace with them; but, unluckily, they despised him, and a subordinate who despises his employer must be a very unusual sort of human being if he can deny himself the luxury of manifesting his contempt. Poor Fraser often felt that he merited contempt and

had only his own weakness to thank for it; yet he shrank, not unnaturally, from adopting the one course which would have had some prospect of success, and making a clean sweep of the household. It requires considerable courage and hardness of heart to dismiss, without good and sufficient cause, servitors who have grown gray in the discharge of their functions.

However, he really thought that he would have to dismiss Barton, the gamekeeper. There was very good and sufficient cause for that step, and he felt sure that if he decided upon it, he would not be actuated by his strong personal dislike for the man. That Barton was systematically robbing him he had been pretty well aware for some time past, and now the bailiff—who had quarrelled with the gamekeeper — had furnished him with such convincing proofs to that effect that it was scarcely possible to do otherwise than act upon them. Nevertheless, he dreaded the inevitable interview, knowing full well that Barton would be insolent; and as he walked homewards from the White House he was wondering whether,

after all, the thing might not be done by letter or by deputy.

No such chance of shirking his legitimate responsibilities was, however, granted to him; for hardly had he entered upon his own domain when he met the delinquent face to face, and was thus forced to recognise the necessity of saying what had to be said then and there. Barton flung his forefinger up to the brim of his hat, cast a sardonic side-glance at the fiddle and remarked—

'Fine evenin,' sir.'

'Yes; it is a fine evening,' answered Fraser.

'I want to speak to you, Barton; I should have sent for you to-morrow morning if I had not met you now. I have been looking through your book, and I find that I have been charged several times over for what appear to be the same accounts. You can produce your receipts, I suppose?'

'I ain't got no receipts, sir,' answered the man sullenly. 'Whatever bills has been sent in to me has been passed on to you weekly, and 'tain't no fault of mine if you've mislaid

'em. There was a few trifles, I b'lieve, as I paid for out of my own pocket at the time and entered in the book as sundries.'

'I am not talking about the sundries; I will come to them by and by. What I want to have accounted for are bills from the carpenter, the corn-merchant and others, which are put down in your book as having been paid and for which I have no vouchers.'

Barton probably regretted that he had presumed so far upon his master's heedlessness as to specify details; but he answered stoutly: 'Every bill as I've had you've had, sir; I can swear to that. Likely as not you tossed 'em into the waste-paper basket.'

'No; I never throw away receipts. Then, as to the sundries of which you spoke just now, I must confess that I do not see how you can possibly have spent what you profess to have spent upon them.'

'Lord bless you, sir!' returned Barton, with sovereign disdain, 'what do *you* know about the expense of rearing young birds and keeping coverts stocked like they should be?'

'As I have often told you, I know nothing about such matters; but I know that an honest man always takes care to account for every penny that he pretends to have laid out. Unless you can hand me over a satisfactory account of that kind, Barton, we must part, I am afraid.'

The stalwart gamekeeper glared savagely at the "miserable cockney" (as he mentally stigmatised his employer) in whose power it was to deprive him of a very comfortable berth. He had not been too proud to rob the miserable cockney; but he was a great deal too proud to submit to insulting accusations from such a quarter.

'Now, look 'ee here, sir,' said he: 'man and boy, keeper and underkeeper, I've been employed on this estate, as I may say, pretty well all my life long, and the old squire——'

'Yes, yes; I know all that,' interrupted Leonard in his fretful way; 'you have mentioned it once or twice before. But you see, what we are concerned with is the present, not the past.'

'So we are, sir, worse luck! I never thought to see the day when I should stand here to be called dishonest by one of your name. Nor yet I didn't ought for to stand it.'

'You had better knock me down, then,' returned Leonard; 'why don't you? It wouldn't be a very difficult thing to do. After that, you might prove your honesty by the simple process of producing your receipts, and I would not only forgive you but beg your pardon. As matters stand at present, I can only say that you appear to me to be a singularly impudent sort of thief.'

For a moment Barton looked more than half inclined to profit by the first part of his master's invitation; but he reflected that he could not possibly comply with the second: moreover, he was unable to refuse a grudging tribute of respect to one who, contrary to all expectation, had given evidence of possessing a certain amount of courage. He therefore changed his tone, as he replied:

'I see how 'tis, sir; I know very well who to thank for this. And if I chose to speak

I could tell you some things about that man Soames as'd may be surprise you. He didn't never ought to have been made bailiff, sir, that's the truth. Don't know nothin' about his own business, nor yet won't let other folks mind theirs. Talk about dishonesty! why, that man has been makin' his fortun' out of you, sir, since you come here, in a way you wouldn't believe.'

'I don't wish to hear anything against Soames from you,' returned Leonard coldly; 'you will not improve your own case by blackening the character of your fellow-servants.'

'You might have said as much as that to Soames, sir. And if you come to blackenin' people's characters when their backs is turned —why, 'tisn't only servants as has some queer stories told of 'em. That there Soames he's said a deal worse about you and Mrs. Chaine nor ever I have, though I shouldn't wonder if I'd seen a bit more nor what he has.'

'How dare you mention Mrs. Chaine's name in that way, you insolent ruffian!'

called out Fraser, whom this unforeseen attack enraged quite as much as it could possibly have been intended to do.

'Oh, no offence, sir,' returned the man, with an unconcealed sneer.

'There is offence — there is very great offence, and I will take care that it shall not be repeated. You may consider yourself dismissed for theft and gross misconduct; to-morrow you shall receive a month's wages, and I will allow you a week, but no more, to move out of your cottage.'

Barton's sensations were somewhat akin to those of a big dog who has been unexpectedly pinned by a little one. He was so taken aback that, instead of demanding proofs of his dishonesty, as he ought to have done, he began to whimper. He assured his master that he had never intentionally misconducted himself, he represented how very hard it was upon the father of a family to be cast adrift at what you might call a moment's notice, and he promised that he would do his very best to give satisfaction in the future. But he had to

deal with a man who was both unaccustomed to bear rule and unable to take a philosophic view of human frailty.

'I have had a great deal of patience with you, and you have chosen to exhaust my patience,' was Leonard Fraser's reply; 'you will have to try your hand upon somebody else's patience now. It will be no fault of mine if you find difficulty in obtaining a fresh situation; I must, of course, tell the truth about you to any one who may apply to me for your character.'

'That's pretty much the same thing as telling me I may go the workhouse, sir,' observed Barton sullenly.

'I am sorry if it is so; but really I can't help it. I have no alternative but to speak of you as I have found you.'

The man turned pale. His eyes gleamed and he thrust forward his lower jaw as he answered, 'Thank you, sir; I won't forget what I owe to you and that feller Soames.'

He marched off without further parley, while Leonard Fraser resumed his walk, feel-

ing quite two inches taller. Wise men never render a fellow-creature desperate; but honest men often do so, and Fraser, who was honestly persuaded that the gamekeeper was a rascal, flattered himself that he had for once displayed a proper degree of firmness and severity. It did not occur to him that, after what had passed, Barton might be an awkward sort of customer to meet in a lonely place during the night; nor, to do him justice, would he have acted otherwise if such an idea had entered into his head.

CHAPTER XV

FATALITY

While Leonard Fraser was disposing of his rebellious gamekeeper in the manner described above, another encounter was taking place not far off which had less decisive results. John Chaine stepped forward to meet his brother, strong in the consciousness that he possessed almost incontrovertible proofs of the latter's treachery, yet weak inasmuch as he had a sneaking hope that his proofs might be controverted. He had always loved and admired this brother of his; he was not anxious that his faith should be destroyed, notwithstanding the wrath that had been smouldering within him all day long, and it was in somewhat deprecating accents that he began:

'I have had two very unpleasant letters about you, Wilfrid, from a woman who calls

herself Jessie Viccars and states that she is a daughter of old Mould, the market-gardener at St. Albyn's. I shall be very glad if you can tell me that what she says is untrue; but upon the face of it, it looks as if she had made out a clear case against you.'

Wilfrid's presence of mind never deserted him. He only smiled and remarked: 'I wonder at her having written to you; I should have thought she would have preferred attacking the governor.'

'It would have been a good deal more awkward for you if she had done that.'

'It would indeed; and that is why I should have expected her to do it. What could she hope to gain by letting you into the secret of my peccadilloes? It is so obvious that I have only to request you, more or less politely, to mind your own business.'

'Well, that is just what I propose to do,' rejoined John, slightly nettled. 'I don't set up to be a saint, and I am sure I have no wish to stir up mud unnecessarily; but such a thing as this can't be called an ordinary peccadillo.'

'Such a thing as what?'

'The woman says you have promised to marry her. You may or may not be bound to do so—I can't tell, and it doesn't particularly concern me. But what does concern me rather particularly is her assertion that you are scheming to set my father against me and get yourself nominated as his heir. I should like you to be as good as to disprove that assertion, if you can.'

'Oh, I see,' said Wilfrid, laughing. 'She must have thought that there would be some difficulty in getting the governor to believe her preposterous yarn, but that you would probably be more gullible. Now really, John, you ought to know that, so far from having tried to get you into trouble with our esteemed parent, I have been fighting your battles for you with him ever since I came down here. If I had wanted him to quarrel with you and disinherit you, I couldn't have done better than leave you alone; for anything equal to your ingenuity in rubbing him the wrong way I never beheld. As a matter

of fact, I have gone very near to making him quarrel with me by taking your part. Candidly—don't you know that it is so?'

'I am not quite sure of it,' answered John. 'When you say that the woman's yarn is preposterous, do you mean that you never gave her a promise of marriage?'

'My good John, do I look like the sort of man to make such an insane promise?'

He proceeded to demonstrate how and why such a promise would be insane, and he did not scruple, in the course of his remarks, to impute to poor Mrs. Viccars a character and a history which, if accurate, would certainly have been held sufficient by most men to absolve him from any obligation to make her his wife. But the grave severity of John's countenance did not relax.

'All that would sound plausible enough,' he answered, 'if I had not in my pocket a letter, written to her by you just before you left London, which seems to establish the truth of her charges.'

For the first time Wilfrid changed colour.

He recollected writing that letter, though he did not recollect precisely what he had said in it, and he cursed his folly for having departed in this solitary instance from his usual rule of never compromising himself in black and white.

'A letter?' he repeated. 'Yes; I believe I did write to her. The fact of the matter was that she had been bullying me to that extent that I was ready to say almost anything to get rid of her. Just let me see it, will you?'

'Well, no,' answered John; 'I don't feel inclined to give it up. For one thing, it isn't my property, and, for another thing, I'm afraid I should be an ass if I were to give you the chance of destroying documentary evidence.'

'Oh,' said Wilfrid, with a forced smile, 'this is a declaration of war, then—eh?'

'If you choose to call it so,' assented his brother. 'I'm sure I don't want to get you into a mess if I can help it; but I have a right to defend myself, and I tell

you plainly that I shall show that letter to my father.'

Wilfrid had that gift which so few of us possess of fastening at once upon the essential point in an emergency. Now, the one essential thing as regarded the present crisis was that he should get hold of the letter which he had so imprudently written, and in a very few seconds he had decided upon his course of action.

'My dear fellow,' said he, 'you have been made the victim of a complete misrepresentation. There is more in all this than I can explain to you without going into the whole history of my connection with Jessie Viccars. I dare say it is better that you should hear the whole history, only it will take rather a long time to tell. Will you give me some dinner if I walk home with you now? Then we could have a quiet evening together, and I could make a clean breast of it, and, I hope, convince you that, whatever I may be, I am no enemy of yours.'

John made the only reply that it was

possible to make, and Wilfrid rejoined, 'All right, then. I'll just run back to the house and be with you again in half a second, if you don't mind waiting.'

Presently he was in his bedroom and had thrust into his pocket a narcotic of which he sometimes made use when troubled by sleeplessness. His plot was one of which the execution seemed likely to present little difficulty. Poor John, who had a weak head, and who, in his younger days, had been given to indulging in deeper potations than were good for him, could be drugged and robbed without any great ingenuity or any great risk. On the following morning, when he would be ashamed of having been intoxicated and indignant at having been despoiled, it would be the simplest thing in the world to say to him, with reproachful surprise, 'My dear fellow, you surely can't have forgotten handing that paper over to me and begging me to destroy it. Of course I obeyed your instructions.' After that the question would become merely one of his word against John's and Jessie's, and he

thought he might very well venture to face such odds.

It was however obviously necessary that he should not let John out of his sight, because it was very necessary that the letter should remain in John's pocket. His first remark, therefore, after he had once more joined his brother was :

'I couldn't keep you waiting while I dressed; so I must throw myself upon Ida's indulgence to excuse me. Keep me in countenance, like a good fellow, and don't you dress either. I dare say you'll let me wash my hands in your dressing-room before dinner.'

All his preliminary measures were crowned with success. During the walk across the park he was talkative and affectionate, declining to enter upon disagreeable subjects until he should have had something to eat, and John, though reserved and somewhat grim in his manner, showed signs of thawing a little under the influence of the other's geniality. On reaching the White House the two men went straight upstairs together; so that the elder

would have had no opportunity, even if he had wished for one, of secreting his precious document unobserved. So far so good; but it was extremely provoking to both of them, when they entered the drawing-room, to find Mr. Leonard Fraser seated there and to learn from Ida that this most unwelcome guest proposed to honour them with his company at dinner.

John, who had scarcely as good reasons for being annoyed as Wilfrid had, behaved much the worse of the two; for his only reply to his wife's intimation was a grunt and a savage scowl, whereas his more urbane brother hastened to say:

'That is delightful; but I am afraid we shall lose the pleasure of listening to your playing and Mr. Fraser's after dinner, because John and I are going to hold a palaver about some dry matters of business.'

'The deprivation won't be a very serious one to either of you,' answered Ida tranquilly. 'Certainly not to John, who hates music and loves matters of business. Mr. Fraser and I had some qualms of conscience about practising

while he was in the house; but now we shall have the relief of knowing that he is enjoying himself in spite of us.'

This sounded like an injudicious speech; but in truth it was meant to be injudicious. Ida was determined that things should come to a climax between her and her husband, and she was not at all sorry to see by his menacing aspect that he was quite disposed to oblige her. Wilfrid's presence was rather a comfort to her than otherwise, because she thought that Wilfrid would probably do his best to avert an unpleasant scene until Mr. Fraser should have departed. Later in the evening she would be ready and willing to take her part in any scene that it might please John to make.

Meanwhile, an hour and a half had to be got through somehow; and the process, as may well be imagined, was not precisely a comfortable one for any of the four persons engaged in it. John ate little, and scarcely spoke at all; Fraser, conscious that there was thunder in the air, was ill at ease, and showed

his uneasiness by talking a great deal and saying some foolish things; Ida, never very skilful at making conversation, maintained an attitude of statuesque expectancy; while Wilfrid, taking in the whole situation, was troubled by a foreboding which was destined to be confirmed. For indeed Ida had no sooner left the room than John, rousing himself from the state of lethargy into which he had apparently fallen, remarked:

'You will neither of you care to sit very long over your wine, I dare say. Wilfrid and I can have our talk in the drawing-room, while the—er—musical performance is going on. I should like to get to bed as early as possible, because I must go up to London by the first train to-morrow morning.'

This speech was objectionable to Wilfrid in more ways than one. Not only did he guess that John's proposed visit to London had been decided upon with the object of interviewing Jessie Viccars, but he perceived that his apprehensions had been too well grounded and that this ungenerous husband had no idea of

permitting his wife and the violinist to amuse themselves together in private. Upon men of ability, however, difficulties always act, or ought to act, as stimulants; so that Wilfrid, although discouraged, did not despair. For the present, what he had to do was to detain the two men in the dining-room as long as he could and to induce John to drink plenty of wine; both of which ends he attained with an adroitness worthy of better employment. The second was not very hard to achieve (for he himself could swallow a vast amount of liquor without inconvenience, and he took care that his brother's glass should be filled and emptied as often as his own), but the first demanded some ingenuity. His best plan, he thought, would be to provoke something like an altercation between John and Fraser; so he set to work to accomplish this, while ostensibly endeavouring to bring them upon more friendly terms, and he succeeded so well that at the end of a quarter of an hour they were snapping and snarling at each other like a couple of angry dogs.

Fraser was not disposed to submit to many jeers or sneers from his host. He had a vague impression that by standing up to that violent and unreasonable personage he was constituting himself the champion of a cruelly-treated woman; so that he did not hesitate to return the thrusts aimed at him with interest. It is, of course, quite unpardonable on the part of any host to insult his guest; but the unlucky thing is that he can do so with comparative impunity, because, if the worst comes to the worst, the insulted guest can only manifest his displeasure by withdrawing. It soon became evident to Leonard Fraser that this was what he would have to do. Contempt for fiddles and fiddlers in general might be borne with—for it is no disgrace to any man to be condemned in company with Paganini and Joachim—but when he had been as good as told in so many words that he individually was a nuisance, the time seemed to have come to say good-night. He rose from his chair, with a heightened colour, remarking:

'After that, I think I had better not trespass any longer upon your hospitality, Mr. Chaine.'

Thereupon John also jumped up and moved towards the door, thus giving an opportunity to his brother of which the latter took prompt and deft advantage. His glass had been refilled when he was taken by the shoulders and forced back into his seat.

'Rubbish!' said the employer of this gentle violence. 'Finish your wine, and don't play the fool, you old duffer! Mr. Fraser, you really mustn't take my poor John too literally. He didn't mean to be rude to you; but the truth is that he has been ruffled to-day, and when John is ruffled he lets fly right and left, without particularly caring in whose face his heels may chance to be flourished. It's only his little way. Now, for goodness' sake let us dispose of the rest of this excellent port in peace! We're much too old and wise to quarrel like schoolboys.'

'I'm sure I don't know what all the row is about; *I* don't want to pick a quarrel with any man,' growled John, swallowing down the draught that had been poured out for him.

He spoke a little thickly; for indeed he had already had the lion's share of the port which Wilfrid was so good as to praise.

But Fraser did not choose to be conciliated.

'I also have no wish to quarrel,' said he, coldly; 'but, all things considered, I should prefer to leave you to your business consultation now. If you want to discuss matters of business,' he added, with a disdainful glance at his entertainer, 'you probably have not much time to lose.'

Wilfrid smiled and made a deprecating gesture. He was now perfectly willing that Fraser should take himself off, and whether the man went away in a good or a bad humour was no concern of his. But it was a little disquieting to hear John say, with a cunning chuckle :

'Very well, Mr. Fraser; since you insist upon going, we won't detain you against your will. I'll see you as far as the high road, though. Fine night for a walk, you know.'

'In about half an hour,' mused Wilfrid, 'you will have fallen into a state of profound coma, my good fellow. Well, I dare say, if we hurry, I can get you there and back again before you begin to feel drowsy; but it's running things rather fine. Anyhow, there wouldn't be the slightest use in attempting to argue with you in your present condition.'

Penetrated with this conviction, and confident in his own ability to bring his plot to a satisfactory issue, the conspirator cheerfully offered to join in the proposed nocturnal ramble, and presently the three men set out beneath the stars, little suspecting what events were to take place before the sun should shine down again upon the woods and fields which were now shrouded in darkness. Fraser, for his part, was quite in the mood to bring about one startling

event by hitting John Chaine in the face. He understood very well that he was being seen off the premises, and he was furious at the indignity which was thus being put upon Mrs. Chaine as well as upon himself. If he had at one time been foolish enough to feel a trifle vain of the conquest attributed to him, his emotion was of a worthier kind now, and he longed, just for once, to show his brutal and triumphant enemy that, fiddler or no fiddler, he at least knew how to strike out from the shoulder when provoked beyond all bearing.

How it came to pass that this most improbable ambition on the part of a feeble and narrow-chested idler was gratified Wilfrid never knew. Wilfrid, in point of fact, was not paying much attention to his companions, who appeared bent upon ignoring one another; his chief anxiety was to get quit of one of them as soon as might be and to hurry the other back to the White House. But when they had crossed the boundary of the Chaine estate and could distinguish the white streak of the dusty

highway before them, it must be assumed that John made some valedictory remark which exhausted the patience of the parting guest; for Fraser stamped upon the ground with a somewhat feminine exhibition of rage, and ejaculating, 'You ill-conditioned brute!' aimed a blow at the speaker which, to tell the truth, was hardly of a nature to harm a fly. Such as it was, however, it served to infuriate John, who ground his teeth, shortened the heavy walking stick which he was carrying in his hand and with one sweep of his arm laid his assailant prostrate.

'Good God!' exclaimed Wilfrid, seizing his brother by the arm and drawing him back; 'what are you going to do? You can't hit a man when he is down. For Heaven's sake, come away before you have committed a murder!'

Wilfrid's alarm was quite genuine. He knew, from having more than once witnessed them, that his brother was liable to frenzies of anger scarcely distinguishable from madness; and he feared that the opiate which he had

administered was acting, as opiates sometimes will, rather as a stimulant than as a sedative. Having no desire to be mixed up in an affray which might have serious consequences, he determined to remove John without further delay—a task which he contrived to accomplish with comparatively little difficulty. Fraser, who had been half stunned and who had not yet got on to his legs again, offered no opposition to the unceremonious retreat of the two brothers; nor did John seem anxious to linger upon the scene of his victory.

'It's his own fault; what the devil did the beggar want to hit me for?' he growled half apologetically while he was being led away.

'Well, he hasn't hurt you much, at all events,' remarked Wilfrid, laughing.

'Hurt me!—no; but he precious nearly made me hurt him. He can't very well come back to my house after this; that's one comfort.'

'The question is,' thought Wilfrid to himself, 'whether *you* will be able to get back to your house or not.'

John was beginning to lurch and stumble in his walk; his head had fallen forwards and his speech became rambling and indistinct. He was, however, eventually conducted in safety to his own dining-room, where he at once let himself drop into a chair and fell sound asleep. To pick his pocket of Jessie's letter was the work of a moment; after which Wilfrid left him and betook himself to the drawingroom in order to give necessary explanations to his sister-in-law.

He found her somewhat agitated and apprehensive.

'What is the matter?' she asked quickly. 'Has Mr. Fraser gone away? I thought I heard the hall-door shut about half an hour ago.'

'Oh, there's nothing much the matter,' answered Wilfrid, assuming an air of compassionate embarrassment; 'only I fancy John must have been rather over-tired to-day, and—and it's never a very prudent thing to put port on the top of champagne. He'll be all right to-morrow; but—well, perhaps the best plan

would be for you to go to bed now and leave him to recover himself. Mr. Fraser begged me to make his apologies to you.'

Ida made a slight gesture of disgust.

'Mr. Fraser was not driven out of the house, I hope?' she said.

'Not exactly,' answered Wilfrid hesitatingly. 'There *was* a little bit of a row; but the less said about it the better. Poor John was hardly responsible for his actions when it happened.'

He declined to be more explicit, and, after he had wished Ida good-night, prepared to start homewards, very well satisfied with the results of his evening's work. All danger, to be sure, was not yet over; but the chief danger had been removed, and it was pretty certain that old Mr. Chaine would think none the better of his eldest son for having entertained a neighbour at dinner and sent him home with a broken head. That Mr. Chaine would hear, sooner or later, of this flagrant breach of the laws of hospitality might be regarded as inevitable.

CHAPTER XVI

WILFRID'S PLAN

As Wilfrid was leaving his brother's house, he was intercepted by the butler, who looked very grave and scandalised, and who said:

'I beg your pardon, sir, but perhaps you would be so kind as to help me in getting the master to bed. He isn't in no state to walk upstairs alone, sir, as I dare say you know, and I'm sure you wouldn't wish the other servants to see him as he is now.'

The man had begun his career as a footman at Chaine Court, and Wilfrid was upon friendly terms with him, as indeed he always took care to be with servants.

'You go to bed and hold your tongue, Clark,' said he; 'we mustn't have Mrs. Chaine disturbed. Mr. John will wake up towards morning, and he'll have the sense to

remember what has happened to him and to stay where he is. He was to go up to London by the early train, he told me.'

'Yes, sir, I believe the dog-cart is ordered; but, dear me, sir, I'm very sorry to see this coming on again! 'Tis many years now since I've known Mr. John the worse for liquor. How did he come for to do it, sir?'

'Really, Clark, I can't tell you, and if I were you, I wouldn't ask him. I suppose you know that a butler's first duty is to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut.'

Clark signified his conviction that that axiom was, upon the whole, a wise one, and Wilfrid walked away in good spirits. How long John's brain would continue to be affected by the drug he could not tell; but he had no wish to rouse him just now and perhaps to be called upon to account for the missing letter. Moreover, it was just as well that Clark should, if necessary, be available as a witness to his master's insobriety. Everything that had occurred that evening was of

a nature to throw discredit upon the actions and statements of that luckless man.

Some men, it cannot be denied, are born unlucky; but Wilfrid was glad to think that he was not one of them, and as for that affair with Jessie Viccars, in which he certainly had not been fortunate, he quite hoped to get out of it by means of point-blank denials if she should be bold enough and inconsiderate enough to denounce him to his father. 'But the chances are that she won't,' he reflected. 'She has had the extreme folly to part with the only bit of evidence that couldn't have been disputed, and that will discourage her and, I trust, lead her to marry somebody in her own station of life. Somebody is sure to ask her, for she is really a very handsome woman.'

He walked leisurely along the path which he had traversed in company with his brother and Fraser a short time before, and when he reached the spot where the encounter between the two men had taken place, he laughed, with an amused recollection of the scene.

'What an old tiger John is when his blood is up!' he muttered. 'Upon my conscience, I believe he would have torn that wretched little fiddler limb from limb if I hadn't interposed. The fiddler ought to be very much obliged to me, if he is a decent fellow, but it is much more likely that he will hate me for having beheld his overthrow. Well, I must admit that I am under some obligation to him, so I won't tell upon him unless I am obliged.'

The most direct way to Chaine Court from the place where he was standing was through a wood, into which he now turned. There being no moon, it was very dark beneath those spreading trees, and once or twice he was provoked to the use of language punishable by law, owing to the roots and undergrowth that impeded his passage, but presently he stumbled over something soft, which was certainly not a root and which for a moment gave an unpleasant shock to his nerves. The shock, however, was but momentary; for his was not a nervous tem-

perament, and it was with comparative unconcern that he bent down in order to discover whether the man over whose body he had so nearly fallen was dead or only drunk. The question was not one in which he felt much personal interest; yet the result of his investigations was of a nature to startle him considerably.

'By George,' he exclaimed, 'it's the fiddler! Is it possible that John can have fractured his skull? I don't think so; he was scrambling up when we left him, and he must have walked a couple of hundred yards or more to get as far as this. All the same, I do believe the man is a corpse. What a devilish awkward thing!'

It did not take him long to convince himself that the hapless Fraser was indeed no more. His hands were cold and stiffening, no movement of the heart was perceptible, nor did the faintest suspicion of breath escape from between his parted lips. 'Dead as Queen Anne!' muttered Wilfrid. 'Well, this is a pretty piece of business! I suppose the

beggar wasn't sound, and the emotion or the fright or something has simply killed him. Precious uncomfortable for John!'

He did not at first doubt but that John was the direct or indirect author of this catastrophe; but, after musing awhile, he struck a light and proceeded to make a closer examination of the body, whence he gathered that poor Fraser must have had some other enemy in the neighbourhood. There were black marks upon the throat which made it evident that death had been caused by strangulation, and as the dead man's watch and money had been left in his waistcoat pocket, the obvious inference was that he had had the bad luck to injure or offend some physically powerful person.

It was not immediately that Wilfrid realised the irrelevancy of speculating upon who that person might be; it was not immediately that he perceived what an excellent chance of bettering his own position Fortune had placed in his way. But when he did recognise his opportunity, no overstrained scruples deterred him

from rejoicing in it and resolving to profit by it. Nevertheless, he had a movement of genuine compassion for his unlucky elder brother.

'My poor John!' he ejaculated, 'the stars in their courses are fighting against you. You will have to make a bolt for it, John—that is, you will have to be persuaded that your only rational course is to bolt—and whether you are brought back in custody or whether you effect your escape, you will never be forgiven by the governor. I am really sorry for you; but all this is principally your own fault. Why must you needs meddle with me? You force me to defend myself; and stupid as you are, you can't imagine that I can afford to let a good chance slip.'

He stooped over Fraser's body once more, re-fastened the shirt-front which he had torn open to place his hand upon the motionless heart, and started off at a run for the White House. He could not tell for certain, but it might very likely be that he had no time to lose.

The men who achieve brilliant diplomatic and political triumphs are those who have their wits about them at the right moment. With all the respect which is due to success, one may perhaps be permitted to doubt whether this class of human beings includes the noblest or the most chivalrous specimens of our race; still, presence of mind is, after all, an admirable quality, and at least so far as this country is concerned, the successful ones are adequately punished for any misdeeds that they may have committed, because they are sure, sooner or later, to incur the execration of posterity for disfiguring the streets of London with their grimy effigies.

There are reasons which render it improbable that a statue of Wilfrid Chaine will ever be added to that melancholy collection; but there is no reason at all to question his possession of the requisite ability, and, whatever may be thought of his morality, no one will deny that it was sharp of him to have formed in so brief a space of time a plan which, under such disturbing circumstances, would hardly

have suggested itself to the generality of us. He had, it is true, that trifling allowance of luck which is indispensable even to the most renowned generals, admirals and prime ministers; for when he reached the White House and stepped stealthily through the open window of the dining-room, he found his brother sitting just as he had left him, with his arms stretched out upon the table and his head buried in his hands. The difficulty of his task would have been enormously increased if John had recovered his senses and had gone upstairs; but nothing so untoward had occurred, and in fact he was obliged to have recourse to the water-jug before he could rouse the sleeper.

John started up, with bewildered eyes, to find his younger brother standing over him and adjuring him to collect himself. 'What is it?' he gasped, as he wiped his dripping face with a napkin — 'what's the matter? Have I had a fit?'

'Get up and walk about,' answered his brother. 'Now, can you understand what I

say? For God's sake, try to remember where you are and what you have done. The matter is that you have got drunk and that you have killed a man. Can you take that in?'

John staggered, raised his hand to his forehead and then stood, blinking frowningly at his interlocutor. 'That's a lie,' said he; 'you're trying some game on with me. I'm not so drunk as you think, my fine fellow, and you won't scare me in that way. I remember very well that you were to give me an explanation to-night which you haven't given yet. What about that woman Wickens —Richards?—I don't recollect her name; but I've got it all right, and her address too.'

Wilfrid sighed patiently. 'The woman's name is Viccars, if that signifies,' he replied; 'but we have something more important than all the Jessie Viccarses in the world to talk about now. Tell me: do you recollect the fact that Fraser dined here and that you walked part of the way home with him afterwards?'

'Yes,' said John, after a short pause; 'of course I do. He was insolent, and he tried to fight me. So then I knocked him down. What of that?'

'Only that when you knocked him down you knocked the life out of him. I don't want to be brutal with you, John; you can't feel this horrible mischance more painfully than I do; but it is absolutely necessary that I should bring you to your senses somehow or other. The man is dead—I stumbled over his body just now as I was walking home—and the question that we have to consider is what is to be done next? We have still a few hours, but only a few, before us. Drink a glass of water, and don't sit down again until you are sure that you know what you are about.'

John did as he was advised, and walked silently up and down the room two or three times. 'I am as sober as ever I was in my life,' he said at length. 'Now, Wilfrid, upon your sacred word of honour as a gentleman, is this story true? Perhaps I ought

not to ask the question; but you have given me some excuse for distrusting you.'

'Upon my sacred word of honour as a gentleman,' answered Wilfrid, 'Fraser is dead. I did not at the time suppose that you had killed him or even that you had hurt him very much; nor of course did you; but the fact is beyond all doubt or dispute. As soon as I had satisfied myself of it, I ran back here to consult you and, if possible, to save you. It is a serious business, John.'

John's pale cheeks testified to his full realisation of that; but he had not seen the dead body, and he naturally clung to an incredulity which was justified by his memory of what had taken place.

'I don't see how anybody could have been killed by a knock on the head like that,' he remarked slowly.

'Neither do I, my dear fellow,' returned Wilfrid, with a touch of impatience; 'but it isn't worth while to discuss probabilities or improbabilities when we know what has

actually occurred. Morally, you may be as innocent as an unborn babe; but the truth is that you are in imminent danger of being sentenced to death and hung.'

John started as if he had been shot.

'Gracious Heavens!' he exclaimed, 'do you mean to say that they will accuse me of murder? Well, let them, if they like. I can call you as a witness to prove that all I did was to hit a fellow who had begun by hitting me. I'm sure, if he is really dead, I regret it as much as anybody can; but it's absurd to pretend that I killed him.'

'What could I say if I were called as a witness?' asked Wilfrid, shaking his head sorrowfully. 'I should be obliged to admit that I had seen you strike a blow which has had fatal results; it is unfortunately notorious by this time that you were upon bad terms with Fraser, and I suppose, if I were pressed, I should have to confess that you drank rather more wine than was prudent after dinner.'

'Perhaps I did,' agreed John, after a pause. 'Yes; I must have taken too much, though I wasn't aware of it at the time, and it doesn't seem to have prevented my walking straight. Well, you might say that I was not quite sober; I dare say that is the truth.'

'Only the law doesn't accept intoxication as an extenuating circumstance, I believe. I thought it all over on my way back here, and my conviction is that the only thing you can do is to cut and run. Luckily, you will be able to secure a good long start.'

'I won't do that,' said John decisively; 'come what may, I shall stay where I am and face it out. Running away would be the same thing as admitting my guilt.'

'No doubt it would; but how can your guilt possibly be denied? It is all very well to assert that you never intended to kill the man, and a jury might believe you —though I'm afraid it is just as likely that they wouldn't—but at the best I don't see

how we could look for anything more lenient than a verdict of culpable homicide or manslaughter, which, as you know, would imply penal servitude for a term of years. That means practical ruin.'

'So would running away. Even if I were fortunate enough to escape being arrested, I could never return home. The utmost that I could hope for would be to make a fresh start in some far-away part of the world under a feigned name, and I'm too old to care about that. No; I shall inform the police myself to-morrow morning and abide by the consequences. Meanwhile, I don't think we ought to leave that poor fellow lying dead in the road. I'll wake up the servants, and we'll have him carried to Hatton Park.'

Wilfrid laid his hand upon his brother's arm. 'For Heaven's sake, John,' he exclaimed, 'don't throw away your liberty so insanely! I can understand how you feel about it—perhaps I should feel as you do if I were in your place—but it isn't only

yourself whom you have to consider. My father would never survive the disgrace of having a son in a convict prison; and then there is your wife. Very likely you may think that she hasn't treated you over and above well; still she is your wife, and you wouldn't wish her to suffer more than is inevitable. Nothing, I am afraid, can save you from being found guilty of having caused Fraser's death; but you may rely upon me to make the most of the provocation that you received, and probably some sympathy will be felt for you. It's illogical, if you like, but it's nevertheless true that a man who has fled from justice is less despised than a convicted felon. And then think of what penal servitude is! To a gentleman it must be a thousand times worse than death.'

John shuddered. He was not wanting in courage; but he was somewhat deficient in nerve and decision, added to which he had a despairing conviction that not only the Fates but all those whose affection he valued were

against him. Why, after all, should he not make a dash for liberty, since that was the only boon that the world had left to offer him? What would he or anybody else gain by his being kept in slavery for long years? Was there the least ground for hope that Ida would look forward to his release from prison? Was it not a great deal more probable that she would dread the approach of that distant date?

'I suppose you are right; I had better disappear, if I can,' he said at last, by way of answer to these melancholy queries. 'I don't see how the thing is to be done, though.'

Wilfrid showed him in a few concise sentences with what comparative ease it might be done. Forty-eight hours at least must elapse before an inquest could be held, a verdict returned and a warrant issued for the apprehension of the culprit. 'And by that time you ought to be virtually untraceable. You have already announced that you intend to go up to London by the first train

in the morning. You will do so, of course, and soon after your arrival you will send a telegram to your wife to say that you are likely to be detained by matters of business for a day or two. You will then draw out all the money that you have lying at the bank, you will shave off your beard, dye your hair black and take lodgings in some part of the town where you are not known—say in Bloomsbury. At the end of a week it will be pretty safe for you to sail for Australia as John Smith or Henry Jones. The prospect isn't alluring, I know; but it's the better of two unpleasant alternatives.'

It certainly sounded so. John assented, with a deep sigh, and after thanking his brother, entrusted him with a few hurried instructions, begging him to see that suitable provision should be made for Ida and that his horse should not be sold. He did not mention his parents, nor was any allusion made to Jessie Viccars in the course of the brief conference which ensued.

'To all intents and purposes I shall be a

dead man henceforth,' the poor fellow said; 'and I don't suppose anybody will wear mourning for me. Well, good-bye, Wilfrid; you had better get home as quickly as you can, or you may be suspected of having had a hand in this affair. As for me, I shan't go to bed. I couldn't trust myself to take leave of Ida, and since you have told her that I have made a beast of myself, she won't wish to see me before I start.'

Wilfrid applauded this decision, and lost no time in taking the proffered advice. Possibly he may have found it a little disagreeable to linger in the company of his victim; anyhow, he foresaw that there might be some difficulty in accounting for the manner in which he had spent his time between his ostensible departure from the White House and his return to Chaine Court. So he squeezed John's hand, said a few words of sympathy and encouragement and left, as he had entered, through the open window. It was not yet a matter of absolute certainty that his plot would succeed; but he

was able, after mentally reviewing the events of the evening, to congratulate himself upon the fact that, whatever might come of them, he could not be personally compromised in any way.

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